The Ghost of Station X
Chapter 1
Acceleration

TESLADYNE ISLAND
AUGUST, 2011

I UNDERSTAND IT'S NOT A PROBLEM **MOST** OF YOUR USERS ARE GOING TO ENCOUNTER.

ANY.

I'M USING IT RIGHT NOW. **NOTHING** IS HAPPENING.

YOU'VE GOT MECHANICAL HANDS.

YOUNG PEOPLE ARE COMING HOME EVERY DAY WITH ONE LESS HUMAN ARM.

THEY SHOULD USE THEIR GOOD HAND.

SO, THIS IS **ANOTHER** THING WHERE YOUR FAULTY DESIGN IS ACTUALLY EVERYONE **ELSE** HOLDING IT WRONG?

IF THAT'S A DIG I WON'T RESPOND TO IT.

bdeet

BOLDEN
NASA
URGENT

I'M SORRY, STEVE, BUT I'VE GOT TO TAKE THIS. THINK ABOUT WHAT I SAID.

TAK

DIRECTOR BOLDEN, THERE ARE OFFICIAL CHANNELS FOR THIS KIND OF--

NO TIME, ROBO. WE HAVE ASTRONAUTS TRAPPED IN ORBIT. THEY'VE GOT SEVEN HOURS TO LIVE.

YOU ARE THEIR ONLY CHANCE.

THAT'S RIGHT, JERRY. ALL TIER ONE PERSONNEL. **NOW.**

MOMENTS LATER...

THE VENTURE ORBITER EXPERIENCED A CASCADE OF FAILURES JUST **MINUTES** AGO.

COMS AND TELEMETRY ARE **DOWN.** THERE ARE **FIVE** ASTRONAUTS TRAPPED IN A BOX WITH NO POWER AND A **DETERIORATING** ORBIT.

HOLY...

NASA, JAXA, ROSCOSMOS, THE ESA, **NONE** OF THEM CAN GET A RESCUE MISSION OFF THE GROUND IN TIME.

IT'S US OR IT'S **NO ONE.**

SO--**WOW,** OKAY, HOW MUCH TIME DO WE **HAVE?**

SEVEN HOURS.

SEVEN HOURS?!

AT MOST.

EASY. CALL THEM BACK. WE CAN'T DO IT.

NOPE, WRONG ANSWER.

I KNOW YOU DON'T WANT TO **HEAR** IT, AND I SURE DON'T WANT TO **SAY** IT, BUT THAT'S HOW IT **IS,** ROBO.

IF WE PULLED EVERYONE OFF THEIR PROJECTS, AND I MEAN ***EVERYONE?*** AND IF WE HAD SEVEN ***WEEKS?*** THEN YEAH, ***MAYBE*** WE COULD LAUNCH A SMALL PAYLOAD.

WE'RE NOT HERE TO TALK ABOUT **IF** WE CAN DO IT. WE'RE TALKING ABOUT HOW WE **WILL** DO IT.

I'M JUST SAYING LET'S BE ***REALISTIC.*** I'LL GRANT YOU WE'VE GOT THE TECH. BUT THE ***FUEL?*** HELL, A ***LAUNCHPAD?*** THIS ***ISN'T*** A SEVEN HOUR PROJECT.

YOU CAN CONTRIBUTE OR YOU CAN **LEAVE.**

GUYS, LET'S FOCUS. NO WAY WE'RE GETTING A ROCKET UP THERE. BERNARD'S MADE THAT CASE. WHAT'S NEXT?

IF WE'RE SAYING "NO" TO ROCKETRY, WE'RE SAYING "NO" TO SIXTY YEARS OF PROVEN TECHNOLOGIES.

LANG'S RIGHT WHATEVER WE DO, IT'LL BE NEW TO US. ***WE*** AREN'T ROCKET SCIENTISTS.

I AM. BUT I BUILT THIS COMPANY ON CRAZY ALTERNATIVE PROPULSION METHODS. SO, LET'S HEAR IT.

WHAT? WHY'S EVERYONE LOOKING AT ***ME?***

YOU HAVE ALL THE WEIRD IDEAS, VIK.

YOU MAKE FUN OF THEM UNTIL YOU *NEED* THEM.

OKAY, FINE. NEGATIVE MASS PROPULSION?

SIMULATIONS ONLY. AND THEY *ALL* END IN EXPLOSIVE FAILURE.

AEROSPIKES. WE'VE GOT *WORKING* AEROSPIKES.

BUT NOTHING TO PUT THEM ON.

NO, WAIT. ROBO, DID YOU EVER DISMANTLE THE...

OH, WHAT THE HELL WAS IT...

THAT HYPERSONIC JET ENGINE YOU MADE WITH A SEAT ATTACHED.

THE TX-17? IT'S IN STORAGE. NOTHING A FEW HOURS COULDN'T FIX.

OKAY. THAT'S SOMETHING.

THERE'S NO LIFE-SUPPORT, BUT I WON'T NEED IT ANYWAY.

THE ***ASTRONAUTS*** WILL.

THEY'VE GOT SPACESUITS.

YEAH, AND FIVE PEOPLE IN SPACESUITS ***PLUS*** ROBO ARE ALL GOING TO FIT IN THAT TINY THING?

OH, YEAH.

DO WE ***NEED*** TO BRING THEM BACK?

THAT'S THE WHOLE POINT.

I MEAN THE VENTURE ***CAN*** DE-ORBIT SAFELY. RIGHT? IT'S JUST OUT OF CONTROL, SO IT'LL BURN UP OR BOUNCE OFF THE ATMOSPHERE UNLESS WE CORRECT ITS COURSE. RIGHT?

CORRECT.

ALL ***ROBO*** HAS TO DO IS GET UP THERE AND STABILIZE IT FOR RE-ENTRY. PROBLEM SOLVED.

WHAT IF THERE'S A HULL BREACH?

FRANKLY? IF IT'S TOO BIG TO BE PATCHED BEFORE ROBO GETS THERE, THEY'LL BE ***DEAD*** BEFORE HE GETS THERE.

JEEZ, BERNARD.

NO.

HE'S RIGHT.

BUT THE TX-17 DOESN'T CARRY ENOUGH FUEL TO GET **INTO** ORBIT.

PUT IT IN THE HERC.

YEAH, THAT'LL TAKE CARE OF THE HEAVY LIFTING.

STILL, WOULDN'T BET ON HAVING ENOUGH LEFT FOR A POWERED LANDING.

AND THAT THING'S ABOUT AS FAR FROM A **GLIDER** AS YOU CAN GET WITHOUT RIPPING THE **WINGS** OFF.

PACK A COUPLE PARACHUTES FOR ROBO, DUMP THE PLANE IN THE OCEAN.

IT'S US OR IT'S NO ONE.

I'LL NEED A TEAM TO GET THE TX-17 PREPPED. IT HASN'T BEEN LIT UP IN **YEARS,** SO GET THE PROVING GROUNDS READY FOR A TEST FIRE TOO.

JENKINS, PREP THE HERCULES. FUELED AND ON THE TARMAC **ASAP.** MINIMAL FLIGHT CREW. NO **DELAYS.**

PULL **ANYONE** WE **MIGHT** NEED. THIS TAKES PRIORITY OVER **ALL OTHER** PROJECTS.

06:32 REMAINING

EASY, EASY.

RIGHT THERE!

OKAY, NOW BRING 'ER DOWN.

PLIERS.

YOU SURE YOU KNOW WHAT YOU'RE DOIN'?

MOSTLY.

C'MON! CAREFUL WITH THAT.

HYDRAULICS ARE GOOD!

THE TRICK IS, EVERY ENGINE HAS A SPEED WHERE IT'LL SHAKE ITSELF APART.

IN THEORY, THIS ONE GOES **SLIGHTLY SLOWER** THAN THAT.

HEADPHONE. TAKE OVER.

OH, SURE. HOW HARD CAN IT BE?

ROBO HERE.

BLETCHLEY PARK, ENGLAND
5:57AM LOCAL TIME

ROBO? SPARROW SPEAKING.

...

MOTHER SENDS HER REGARDS AS WELL.

...

FINE, AND YOURSELF?

UP TO MY OPTICS IN TRYING TO SAVE A PIECE OF THE WORLD.

ZKSHHH

CRANKA CRANK

TINK TANK TINK

HM? NO, NOT AT LIBERTY TO **SAY.** BUT TIME IS A FACTOR HERE, SO--

ZZZT

OKAY. MM-HMM.

WHAT DO YOU MEAN "MISSING?"

I SAID THE SAME THING AN HOUR AGO. BUT HERE I AM IN A POSH SUIT, LOOKING AT A GIANT HOLE IN THE GROUND WHERE THERE ***USED*** TO BE WHAT I IMAGINE WAS A ***QUITE*** HISTORIC BUILDING.

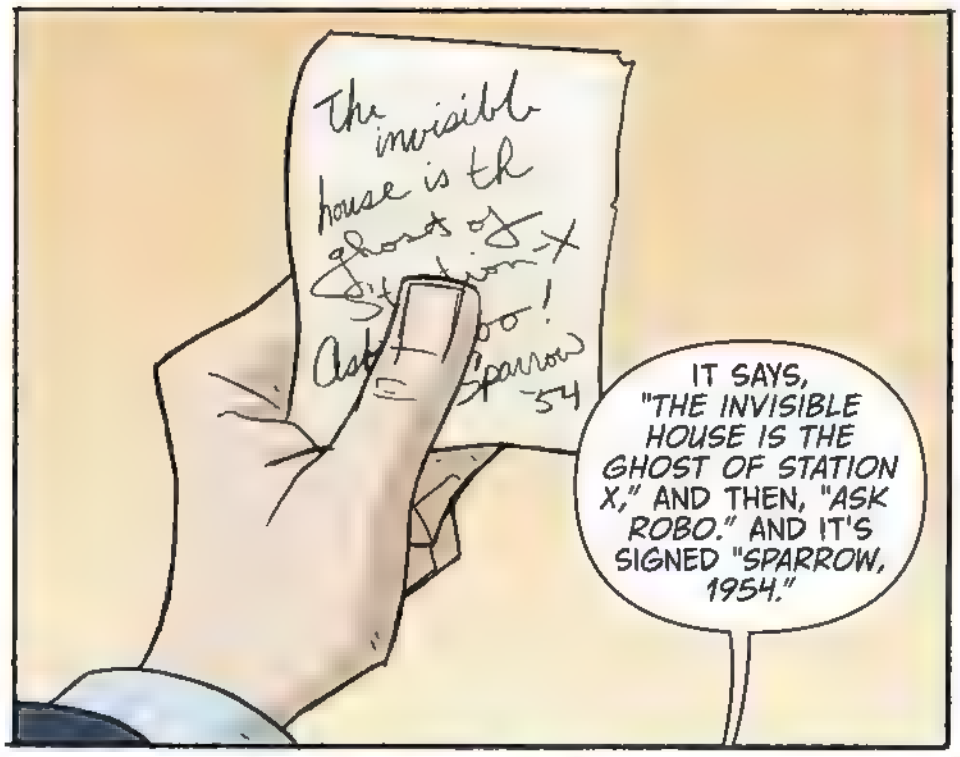
...

THAT'S JUST IT. THERE ARE LAYERS OF SECRECY HERE DATING BACK TO WORLD WAR 2, ***ENIGMA,*** AND ***COLOSSUS.*** WE'RE NOT SURE ***WHICH*** BUILDING IS MISSING YET.

...

THE ONLY CONCRETE INTEL I HAVE IS THE ASSURANCE OF THESE ***FINE*** CURATORS THAT IT WAS ***DEFINITELY*** HERE LAST NIGHT, AS WELL AS EVERY ***PREVIOUS*** NIGHT FOR THE LAST SIXTY YEARS.

THE ONLY ***OFFICIAL*** RECORD THE BUILDING EXISTED IS A MADDENINGLY CRYPTIC NOTE FROM MY ***GRANDMOTHER.***



IT SAYS, "THE INVISIBLE HOUSE IS THE GHOST OF STATION X," AND THEN, "ASK ROBO." AND IT'S SIGNED "SPARROW, 1954."

WELL, I COULD NOT **BEGIN** TO GUESS **WHAT** THAT MEANS OR WHY THAT OLD **BATTLE AXE** THOUGHT I SHOULD BE ASKED ABOUT IT.

...

SORRY. I'M SURE SHE HAD A... GOOD SIDE.

SOMEWHERE.

I'M GOING TO BE TIED UP FOR, WELL, I HAVE **NO** IDEA. BUT LET'S GET A TEAM OUT THERE TO ASSIST YOUR INVESTIGATION. OKAY?

I'LL GO THROUGH THE SPARROW ARCHIVES IN THE MEANTIME. SEE IF THERE'S ANY MENTION OF THIS "INVISIBLE HOUSE" OR "STATION X."

SVALBARD GLOBAL SEED VAULT
SVALBARD, NORWAY
04:14 REMAINING

BRRRING BRRRING

CHATTA CHATTA CHATTA

P-POLAR BEAR PATROL, DR. M-MARTIN SPEAKING.

...

ROBO!

...

NO. WELL, LOUIS *THOUGHT* HE SAW ONE, BUT IT WAS TOO FAR AWAY TO BE SURE.

...

TRANSFER?

THIS ISN'T A CRUEL JOKE LIKE LAST TIME, IS IT?

...

LONDON?

Y-YES. *YES!* YES, WE'LL BE READY! YES!

CHATTA CHATTA CHATTA

I SHOULD BE IN THE MIDDLE OF A RESCUE MISSION FOR NASA WHEN YOU GET SETTLED OVER THERE. JUST CHECK IN WITH JERRY UNTIL YOU HEAR FROM ME.

WE ARE *OUTTA* HERE.

OH, THANK GOD!

*CAN'T BELIEVE **THOSE** CHUCKLEHEADS ARE THE CLOSEST ONES...*

IT'S NOT A JOKE LIKE *LAST* TIME, IS IT?

IF IT IS? WE GET TO SIT IN THE AIRPORT FOR A FEW HOURS AND *WARM UP.*

TESLADYNE
03:58 REMAINING

SKROOOOOSH

NORWAY

I MEAN, HONESTLY. TWO *YEARS* OF STANDING IN A PERPETUAL *BLIZZARD?* IT WAS ONE *LITTLE* MISTAKE!

WE DID *NEARLY* DESTROY THE UNIVERSE.

TECHNICALLY. BUT, Y'KNOW, WE *DIDN'T.*

BZZZRRR

TESLADYNE

WHAT I'M SAYING IS, IT'S A BALANCING ACT BETWEEN ACCELERATION AND FRICTION. THERE'S A *VERY* SMALL WINDOW WHERE THE PLANE DOESN'T *MELT* ITSELF.

HOW SMALL?

WHAT KIND OF ODDS WOULD YOU GIVE A MAN JUGGLING CHAINSAWS THAT HAVE SMALLER CHAINSAWS FOR *HANDLES?*

SVALBARD AIRPORT
03:13 REMAINING

WE'RE IN A PLANE. WE'RE *LEAVING.*

THIS IS REALLY HAPPENING, *THIS IS REALLY HAPPENING.*

TESLADYNE

BWRRRRRRR

SAFETY FIRST, ROBO.

IN THAT THIS HELMET IS THE FIRST SAFE THING I'VE DONE TODAY, YES.

15,000FT AND CLIMBING
01:15 REMAINING

GOT THE LATEST ON THE VENTURE'S PROJECTED POSITION STRAIGHT FROM BOLDEN.

UPLOADING OUR COURSE AND TIMETABLE TO YOUR STATIONS NOW.

CUTTING IT CLOSE.

CLOSE, BUT **UNDER** DEADLINE.

LONDON HEATHROW AIRPORT

I CAN'T BELIEVE WE'RE *HERE!*

IT WASN'T A JOKE!

DR. LOUIS, DR. MARTIN. *SPARROW.*

I'LL BRIEF YOU ON THE WAY. WE KNOW BASICALLY NOTHING AT THIS POINT, SO IT WON'T TAKE LONG.

30,000FT ABOVE SEA LEVEL
00:29 REMAINING

OKAY, ROBO. ON YOUR MARK.

THREE...

...TWO, ONE, RELEASE!

SHUNK

I'M CLEAR.

LOCK S-FOILS IN ATTACK POSITION.

WHAT?

DEPLOY THE WINGS.

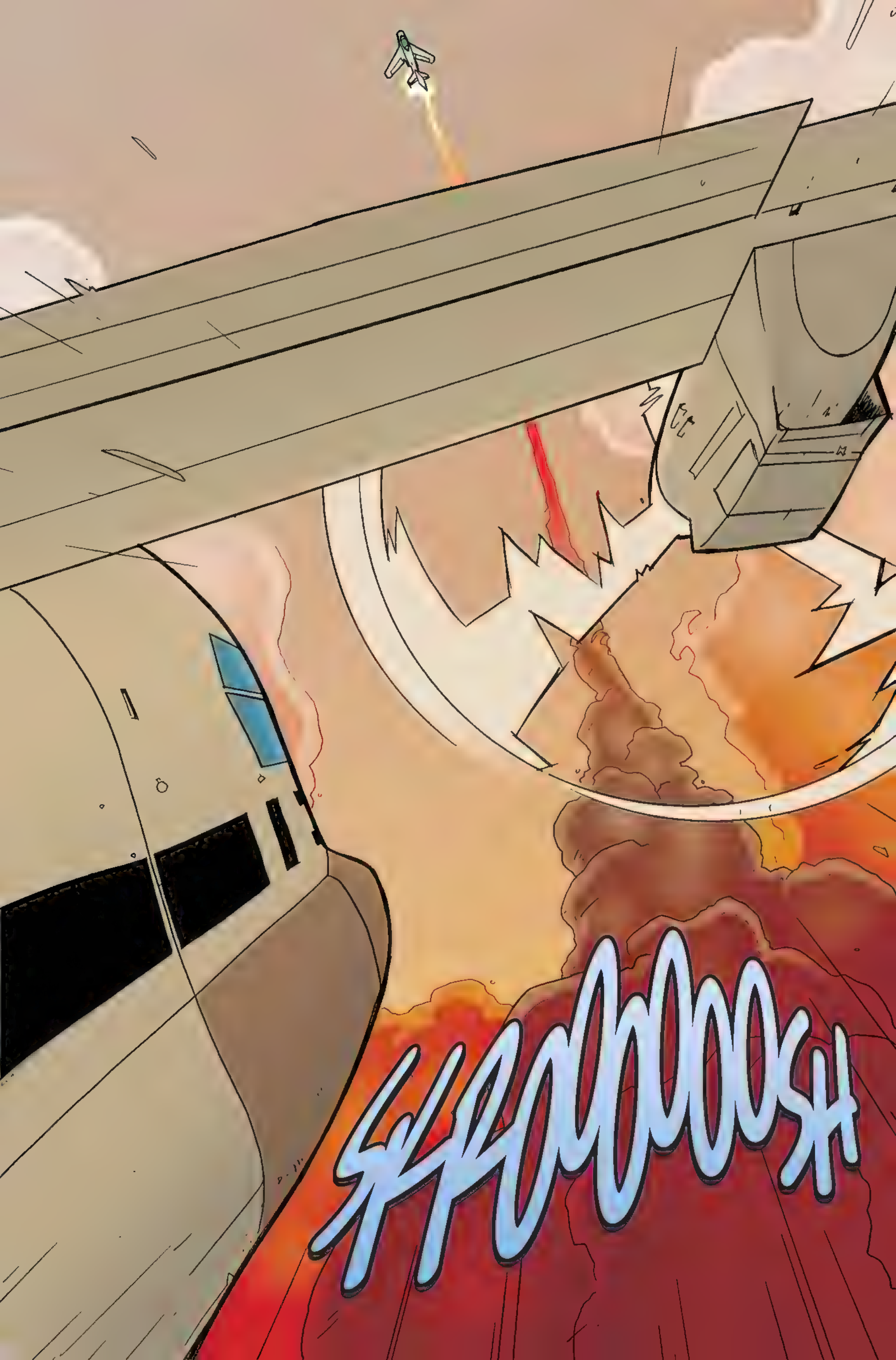
THANK YOU.

FWK

POWERING UP AEROSPIKE.

HOPE THIS WORKS.

VVVVVVVVVVVVVVVVVVVV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WHOA.

ROBO, YOU HOLDING TOGETHER?

MORE OR LESS. LITTLE SHAKY.

WE'RE PICKING UP SOME VIBRATIONS TOO. SHOULD BE WITHIN ACCEPTABLE PARAMETERS.

IF THIS THING DISINTEGRATES AROUND ME WE'LL KNOW WHO TO BLAME.

YOU BUILT IT FROM SCRATCH, SO...

OKAY, SMART ALECK.

TELEMETRY SHOWS YOU'RE CLIMBING A LITTLE TOO FAST.

CORRECTING.

ROBO? YOU JUST BROKE THE WORLD SPEED RECORD FOR A WINGED CRAFT OPERATING UNDER ITS OWN POWER.

WELL. WE **ARE** IN A HURRY.

BLETCHLEY PARK, ENGLAND

IT'S NOT *NECESSARILY* FOUL PLAY. THE EARTH'S ORBIT MAY HAVE CROSSED WITH A NATURALLY OCCURRING WORMHOLE AT THIS *PRECISE* POINT.

I WOULDN'T WANT TO RULE OUT A KRASNIKOV TUBE EITHER.

KRASNIKOV? YOU THINK THE *RUSSIANS* ARE BEHIND IT?

NO, A K-TUBE IS, UM, IT'S A DIFFERENT *KIND* OF WORMHOLE.

MIGHT'VE BEEN *BUILT* BY RUSSIANS FROM A THOUSAND YEARS IN THE *FUTURE* THOUGH.

OR, I SUPPOSE, THEIR SOCIO-ECONOMIC *ANTECEDENTS.*

YOU MEAN *DESCENDENTS.*

AH, BUT NOT IF THEY GO FAR ENOUGH *BACK.*

GENTLEMEN?

OKAY, OKAY. IT *COULD* BE A SIMPLE GLITCH IN THE SIMULATION.

PARDON?

HUMANKIND WILL ONE DAY HAVE ENOUGH PROCESSING *OOMPH* TO RUN SIMULATIONS OF THE UNIVERSE *INDISTINGUISHABLE* FROM REALITY.

SOON AS THAT HAPPENS, THERE'S A 50/50 CHANCE THAT *OUR* UNIVERSE IS A SIMULATION.

THE MORE PROCESSING POWER THEY *GET,* THE MORE SIMULATIONS THEY'LL *RUN,* AND THE *HIGHER* THE ODDS BECOME THAT *WE* ARE A SIMULATION.

SO, *EITHER* HUMANITY SUFFERS TOTAL TECHNO-LOGICAL BREAKDOWN BEFORE IT REACHES THAT POINT...

OR IT'S *VASTLY* MORE PROBABLE THAN NOT THAT THE ENTIRE HISTORY OF OUR UNIVERSE IS NOTHING BUT A BLINK IN A QUANTUM COMPUTER.

MAD MAX LATER OR *THE SIMS* NOW. THOSE ARE YOUR CHOICES.

I'M SORRY, WHAT DOES THIS HAVE TO DO WITH MY *MISSING BUILDING?*

THERE'S NO TELLING. BUT *WE'LL* FIND OUT.

WE'RE *VERY* SMART.

400KM ABOVE SEA LEVEL
LOW EARTH ORBIT

HOW WE DOIN', ROBO?

WE ARE GREEN ACROSS THE BOARD.

NO SIGN OF THE VENTURE THOUGH. DOUBLE CHECK MY POSITION?

NASA

YOU'RE DEAD CENTER, ROBO. IF YOU CAN'T SEE IT, IT OUGHT TO BE ON YOUR SCOPE.

RESCUE

I'VE GOT NOTHING.

MAYBE IT DRIFTED MORE THAN WE THOUGHT?

RESCUE

?!

RESCUE

APPLESA--

ROBO?
ROBO, DO YOU READ?
ROBO! DO YOU COPY?
WHAT'S WRONG?
ROBO! TALK TO ME.
HE JUST FELL OFF MY SCOPES.
IS HE IN SOME KIND OF DEAD ZONE?
HE'S TOO EXPOSED UP THERE.
ROBO! DO YOU COPY?

TO BE CONTINUED

The Ghost of Station X
Chapter 2
Explosion
NASA
FLIGHT RECORDER DO NOT OPEN

WHERE'S ROBO!

HE DROPPED OFF MY SCOPES!

ROBO, *DO YOU READ!*

ROBO, DO YOU *COPY!*

HELL WITH THIS. SWITCHING TO HIS PERSONAL SIGNAL.

WAIT, *WHAT?*

WHAT DO YOU HAVE?

THIS *CAN'T* BE RIGHT.

TALK TO ME.

I'VE GOT HIS PERSONAL TRACKER.

HE'S *FALLING.*

GIVE ME A COURSE FOR INTERCEPT.

INTERCEPT?!

WE'RE *CATCHING* HIM.

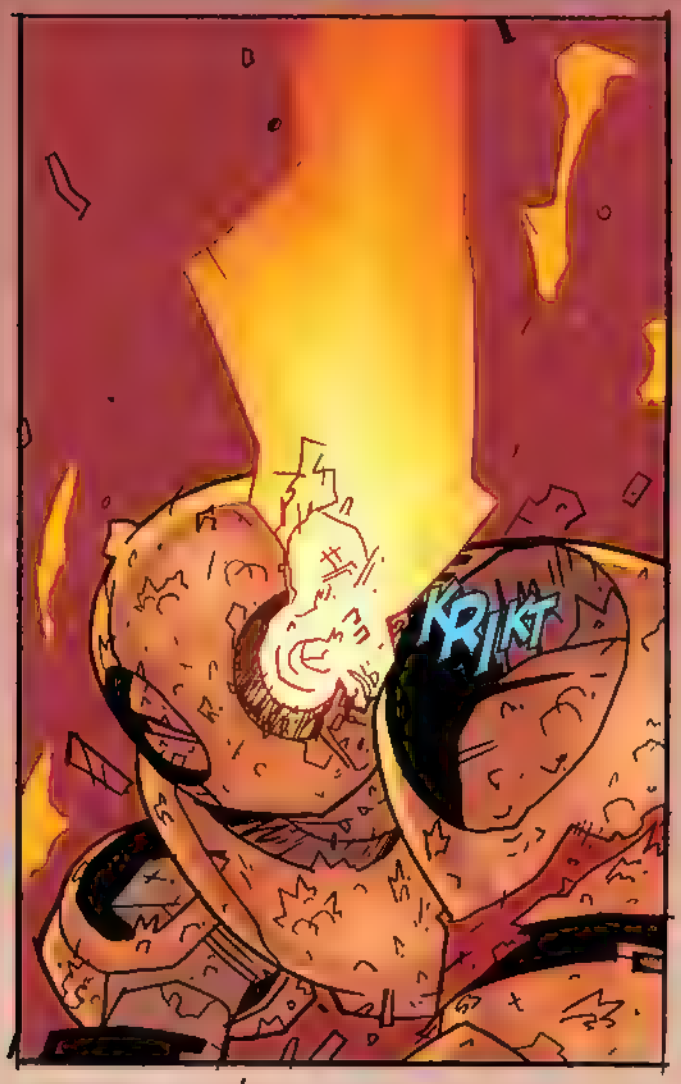
HE'S FALLING AT *THOUSANDS* OF MILES AN HOUR. HE'LL RIP THROUGH US LIKE *PAPER!*

ATMOSPHERE'S SLOWING HIM DOWN. SEE?

HE'S RIGHT, KOA. ROBO'S TERMINAL VELOCITY'S AROUND 200MPH.

WE CAN MATCH THAT. WE CAN *CATCH* HIM.

WE HAVE TO LOSE ALTITUDE AS FAST AS HE IS. IT'S A RACE TO *CRASHING IN THE OCEAN!*


KRAKT

KRAAKT

WHAT'S MY HEADING!

YOU'RE GOOD, YOU'RE ***GOOD!*** WE NEED MORE SPEED.

WE'RE GONNA RIP THE WINGS OFF AS-IS.

WE CAN WORRY ABOUT WINGS LATER.

OKAY, WE'RE ***NEARLY*** THERE!

COMING AROUND.

VRAAAPP

ALMOST, ALMOST!

PULL UP.

WE HAVE TO PULL UP.

KLUNK

WE GOT 'EM! WE GOT 'EM!

HRNG!

UM.

UH. S-SIR?

BWWWAAAAAAKKKK

AAAAAHHH!

BWWWAAAAARRRR

I'M...IT'S BAAAD.

TAKING SO LONG TO

GENCY POWER, GET PHIL

ABLY WON'T MELTDOWN, BUT I

JULIE? HOW'S HE LOOKING?

INTERNALS ARE A *MESS*, BUT MORE'S SALVAGEABLE THAN WE ESTIMATED.

STILL. I'M PROJECTING A 30% REBUILD. *MINIMUM.*

IF HE SURVIVES, I'M GONNA *KILL* HIM.

CAREFUL. WE'RE NEAR THE CORE.

IT'S TECHNOLOGY A HUNDRED YEARS *AHEAD* OF OUR TIME.

AND IT WAS BUILT ALMOST A HUNDRED YEARS AGO. IN *SECRET*. BY ONE MAN. IN WHAT WAS PROBABLY HIS *GARAGE*.

AND IF IT BREAKS?

BEST CASE SCENARIO: ROBO DIES.

WORST CASE: ROBO DIES, *WE* DIE, AND A CHUNK OF NEW ENGLAND BECOMES A RADIOACTIVE WASTELAND.

FIGURED.

YEAH. IF HE SURVIVES, I *AM* GOING TO KILL HIM.

BLETCHLEY PARK, ENGLAND

NO, I EXPECTED THAT. IT'S BEEN THE SAME WITH EVERYTHING ELSE CONNECTED TO THIS PLACE.

I'M THERE NOW. KEEP AT IT, YEAH? THEY HAD TO MISS *SOMETHING.*

I'VE EXHAUSTED MY CONTACTS. THE BUILDING THEY STOLE DOESN'T EXIST ON PAPER. IT DOESN'T EVEN HAVE AN *ADDRESS.*

I FOUND OUT WHAT "STATION X" MEANS. IT'S STATION *TEN.* THAT'S WHAT THEY CALLED BLETCHLEY DURING THE WAR. NOT EXACTLY THE *GROUND SHAKING* LEAD WE WANTED.

WE'RE MAKING *SOME* PROGRESS ON THIS END, BUT MARKING THESE CABLES IS SLOW, TEDIOUS WORK.

YES, WHAT *EXACTLY* AM I LOOKING AT?

A WEB OF NETWORKING CABLES AND POWER LINES. WE'RE MAPPING THEM TO GET A CLEARER PICTURE OF WHAT MIGHT'VE BEEN IN HERE.

IT'S *BAFFLING* THOUGH. THERE'S OLD COPPER TELEGRAPH WIRE MIXED IN WITH FIBER OPTICS AS IF THAT'S NOT *CLEARLY INSANE.*

OUR CURRENT =MUNCH= MODEL PREDICTS AT *LEAST* A COUPLE SUPER-COMPUTERS.

WE HAVEN'T DONE ANY COMPUTING AT BLETCHLEY SINCE *TURING* AND HIS CODE BREAKERS LEFT AFTER THE WAR.

THAT YOU *KNOW* OF.

KNOCK KNOCK

COME IN.

ROBO?

HAVE WE HEARD FROM BOLDEN YET?

WELL, I THINK THE MORE IMPORTANT QUESTION IS...

WHAT WERE YOU THINKING?!

PHIL.

DO YOU KNOW WHAT MY *JOB* IS HERE?

I--

I MAKE SURE YOUR EXPERIMENTAL POWER SOURCE NO ONE ***REALLY*** UNDERSTANDS DOESN'T KILL MILLIONS OF PEOPLE!

I SIGN THE PAPERWORK SAYING YOUR HEART DOESN'T VIOLATE SOME ***VERY IMPORTANT*** INTERNATIONAL LAWS!

AND *I'M* THE ONE WHO GOES TO *WAR CRIMINAL JAIL* IF YOU DO SOMETHING *RECKLESS* AND *STUPID* AND START LEAKING RADIATION!

DO YOU *KNOW* HOW CLOSE YOU WERE TO MELTING DOWN?

WARNING

I--

SHUT UP, NO YOU *DON'T!*

NEITHER DO I! BECAUSE YOUR TEMP GAUGE *MELTED!*

PHIL!

ALL RIGHT, OKAY!

HE GETS IT, *OKAY?*

SORRY, I KNOW. IT'S JUST--

JUST *WHAT?*

JUST THAT I SPENT *TWENTY-EIGHT HOURS* PUTTING HUMPTY DUMPTY BACK TOGETHER AGAIN--

HEY!

--BECAUSE HE'S SO DAMN *DUMB* HE FELL *FOUR HUNDRED KILO-METERS* AND DAMN NEAR *KILLED HIMSELF!*

WILL EVERYONE STOP YELLING FOR ONE SECOND!

THIS BETTER BE GOOD.

NO, THIS BETTER BE THE BEST.

CHARLIE BOLDEN, THE GUY IN CHARGE OF NASA? HE CALLED MY PERSONAL LINE. SOMETHING WAS WRONG WITH THE SHUTTLE AND WE WERE THEIR LAST HOPE AT GETTING THE ASTRONAUTS BACK ALIVE. IT WAS A RESCUE MISSION!

I GOT UP THERE AND...

...SOME KIND OF EXPLOSION.

HAVE WE HEARD FROM DIRECTOR BOLDEN? WHAT HAPPENED TO THE ASTRONAUTS?

ROBO? I'VE GOT DIRECTOR BOLDEN ON THE LINE.

PATCH HIM THROUGH TO MY HEAD.

DIRECTOR BOLDEN!

ROBO, YOUR PEOPLE GOT IN TOUCH WITH ME MINUTES AFTER YOU LANDED. YOU HAD US WORRIED FOR A COUPLE OF DAYS.

IT WAS NOTHING.

NOTHING?! *NOTHING?!*

LET ME GET STRAIGHT TO IT.

ROBO, I *DID NOT* PLACE THAT CALL.

SPACE

IT'S OUT THERE

WAIT, WHAT?

THERE IS A SHUTTLE MISSION, BUT THEY'RE DOING FINE. AND YOU WERE NOWHERE NEAR IT, INCIDENTALLY.

WE HAD A WHOLE CONVERSATION...

YOUR PEOPLE SAID I CALLED YOUR PRIVATE LINE?

YES.

THAT'S NOT THE PROTOCOL.

YEAH. I SAID AS MUCH AT THE TIME.

ROBO, THIS IS NASA. THERE'S THIRTY PAGES OF PROTOCOL FOR USING THE BATHROOM IN SPACE. THIRTY-SIX COUNTING THE APPENDIXES. WE DO EVERYTHING BY THE BOOK.

YOU DO, DON'T YOU.

I'VE ALREADY STARTED AN INTERNAL INVESTIGATION. I CAN'T IMAGINE THIS IS ONE OF MY PEOPLE, BUT...

I'LL HAVE A TEAM LOOKING INTO IT ON MY END TOO. SEE IF WE CAN'T TRACE THE CALL. WE'LL KEEP YOU POSTED.

YOU GUYS DONE YELLING?

FOR NOW.

YOU NEED SOME FINAL CHECKS, THEN YOU'RE FREE TO GO.

THIS HAS BEEN BUGGING ME SINCE WE GOT HERE. ***WHY*** WOULD YOU STEAL A ***BUILDING?***

MUST'VE FOUND OUT WHAT WAS INSIDE.

THAT'S WHAT I MEAN, THOUGH. WHEN YOU ***STEAL*** SOMETHING, YOU TRY TO DO IT SO NO ONE NOTICES, RIGHT?

THE WHOLE ***BUILDING*** IS GONE. THAT IS, LIKE, ***THE MOST*** OBVIOUS CRIME YOU CAN DO.

YOU ROB A BANK WITH A NOTE AND A CANDY BAR IN YOUR COAT POCKET. YOU DON'T DRAG THE ***WHOLE VAULT*** DOWN THE STREET.

OKAY, YEAH. WE'RE DOING THIS WRONG.

WE'VE BEEN TRYING TO FIND OUT ***WHAT*** WAS STOLEN AND IT'S GETTING US NOWHERE.

THERE'S TOO MUCH SECRECY SURROUNDING THIS PLACE. EVEN IF WE FORM A CLEAR HYPOTHESIS OF WHAT WAS ***IN*** HERE, WE'LL NEVER GET A STRAIGHT ANSWER.

SO, THE REAL QUESTION IS ***HOW*** WOULD YOU TAKE A ***WHOLE BUILDING?***

WE TRACK ***THAT*** DOWN, WE'LL FIND THE ***WHO*** AND THE ***WHY*** SHORTLY AFTER.

"THE INVISIBLE HOUSE IS THE GHOST OF STATION X."

WHAT ARE YOU ***TELLING*** ME?

ENERGY LEVELS NOMINAL. NO RADIATION.
AND YOU'RE NOT BRAIN DAMAGED. PROBABLY
WE'RE GOOD TO GO?
WE'RE DONE. GO PUT ON SOME *REAL* CLOTHES.
LESS ROBUTT, *MORE* ROPANTS. PLEASE.
YEAH, YEAH. LAUGH IT UP.
AHAHAHA!

KRAKT

I'VE GOT A TEAM TASKED WITH TRACKING THAT CALL, ROBO.

ION-5

WANTED

ROBUTT

AND THE ***PENTAGON'S*** BEEN TRYING TO REACH YOU. I HAD TO STALL THEM BECAUSE, UH, YOU WERE SORTA ***DEAD*** FOR A COUPLE DAYS.

*GOOD. MAKE SURE THEY SCRUB OUR **ENTIRE** TELCOM NETWORK.*

WHAT DO THEY WANT?

TO YELL AT YOU FOR ATTACKING THEIR SATELLITE.

IS THAT WHAT HIT ME?

*STALL THEM. AND GET **ALL** THE TIER ONE PERSONNEL FOR A MEETING. TEN MINUTES.*

POWELL?

ARMORY

BUNS OF STEEL

SPACY

HEY, ROBO. HEARD YOU HAD A BIT OF A TUMBLE.

A BIT.

WHAT BRINGS YOU DOWN TO *EXOTIC BALLISTICS?*

GOT A GUN NEEDS FIXING.

IF IT'S A GUN, I CAN FIX IT.

I CAN'T FIX *THAT.*

THIS ISN'T A GUN. NOT *ANYMORE.*

THAT'S WHY I BROUGHT IT DOWN HERE.

THIS IS A PAPERWEIGHT *SHAPED* LIKE A GUN.

I WAS WORSE OFF THAN THAT AND I'M **FINE.**

I'M SORRY. IT'S **DEAD,** ROBO. I KNOW YOU'VE HAD IT FOR A LONG TIME.

EIGHTY YEARS.

DAMN SHAME. WEBLEY MARK VI. **CLASSIC.** I COULD LOOK INTO GETTING YOU ANOTHER ONE, OR--

NO, DON'T.

ROBO?

GO AHEAD.

YOUR MEETING'S READY.

I'LL BE RIGHT THERE.

THANKS ANYWAY, POWELL. SORRY TO WASTE YOUR TIME.

HMM...

ROBO!

YOU HAD US WORRIED FOR A WHILE.

WHAT *HAPPENED* UP THERE?

WE WERE **TRICKED.** SIMPLE AS THAT. NO SHUTTLE. NO ASTRONAUTS. NO EMERGENCY.

A TRAP.

PRECISELY.

WE'RE UNDER ATTACK.

TO BE CONTINUED

The Ghost of Station X
Chapter 3
Propagation

ARE WE *SURE* IT WAS AN ATTACK?

SOMEONE SAW TO IT I WAS HIT WITH A MILITARY SATELLITE AT ORBITAL VELOCITY FOUR *HUNDRED* KILOMETERS IN THE SKY.

THAT WASN'T DONE ON A *WHIM.*

OKAY. WHO COULD MAKE THAT HAPPEN?

HELSINGARD'S OUT. TOO MODERN. NOT ENOUGH UNDERGROUND BUNKERS.

DR. DINOSAUR TOO. HE'S NOT *TOGETHER* ENOUGH TO PULL OFF SOMETHING THIS COMPLEX.

THIS HAS DELPHI WRITTEN *ALL* OVER IT.

SERIOUSLY. HIGH TECH, A LITTLE *TOO* CONVOLUTED, *PLUS* A WEIRD CONSPIRACY VIBE. A SIGNED *INVITATION* WOULD BE LESS OF A GIVEAWAY.

COULD BE MAJESTIC 12. OR DEPARTMENT ZERO.

OR A SPLINTER GROUP. *OR* A NEW PLAYER.

ANGERING POWERFUL PEOPLE IN CHARGE OF SHADOWY ORGANIZATIONS IS PRETTY MUCH MY *HOBBY.*

HRM.

WE GOT 'EM!

"GOT 'EM" WHAT?

THE *CALLS!* WE TRACKED THEM!

THAT WAS QUICK.

IT WAS A ONE IN A *MILLION* SHOT. WE WERE SCRUBBING THE CALL'S INBOUND TRAFFIC FOR NOISE WHEN WE FOUND A SERIES OF CYCLIC--

WHO MADE THE CALL, ZACK?

NO ONE! WELL, I MEAN, *SOMEONE,* BUT THEY WEREN'T USING A PHONE. IT WAS A *NUMBER STATION!* THEY HIJACKED A TELCOM SIGNAL TO *ACT* LIKE A PHONE!

NUMBER STATION?

SECRET RADIO SIGNALS. THEY BROADCAST IN CODE. LOW POWER, SHORT RANGE, HARD TO FIND AND HARDER TO TRACE.

SO, WE'RE DOWN IN THE SIGNAL INTELLIGENCE DE-PARTMENT--

WE HAVE A SIGINT DEPARTMENT?

WE HAVE A ***LOT*** OF DEPARTMENTS.

--AND PRETTY QUICK WE NOTICED THE NOISE ON OUR FAKE NASA CALL HAD AN ***UNCANNY*** SIMILARITY TO WHAT THE SIGINT MAINFRAME WAS WORKING ON.

SPECIFICALLY, NUMBER STATION "OMAHA 3-NOTE." WE DID SOME DIGGING, AND OKAY, I'LL SKIP THE HACKER BUZZWORDS, ***BUT:*** THAT STATION AND YOUR NASA CALL ARE FROM THE SAME ***SOURCE.***

THAT'S A ***MAJESTIC 12*** STATION.

THIS IS TOO EASY. THEY ***WANT*** US TO FIGURE IT OUT.

THAT'S THE THING. I'M NOT SURE WE EVER ***WOULD*** HAVE. NUMBER STATIONS ARE FOR SHORT RANGE WIRELESS COMMUNICATION. ***NOT*** FOR DUPING CROSS COUNTRY LANDLINE CALLS.

IT WAS SHEER CRAZY LUCK WE HAPPENED TO SEE THE CORRELATION.

IT'D BE LIKE--LIKE PUTTING DOWN A MOUSE-TRAP WITHOUT ANY ***BAIT.*** OR ANY MICE IN THE ***HOUSE.*** AND THEN JUST ***HOPING*** ONE GETS CAUGHT EVENTUALLY.

ZACK'S RIGHT. YOU DON'T SET TRAPS LIKE THAT. WE CAN TAKE THEM BY SURPRISE AND RAID THE OMAHA STATION.

HOW LEGAL ***IS*** THIS? TESLADYNE CAN'T OPERATE ON SOVEREIGN SOIL WITHOUT CLEARANCE FROM LOCAL AUTHORITIES.

THIS WASN'T ***JUST*** AN ASSASSINATION ATTEMPT. THEY TURNED ***TESLADYNE*** INTO A WEAPON AND IT NEARLY WORKED. I'M STOPPING IT.

PARTICIPATION IS VOLUNTARY.

DON'T YOU THINK YOU'RE OVERDOING IT?

I'VE BEEN WITH THIS COMPANY LONGER THAN ANY OF YOU.

SO?

THE THINGS I'VE SEEN.

BORN TO DIG

LAW 64MM

BERNARD.

YOU'RE STAYING WITH THE PLANE.

OH, THANK GOD!

ROBO!

POWELL.

GLAD I CAUGHT YOU. I WANTED YOU TO HAVE THIS.

YOU'RE JOKING, RIGHT?

COMPLETELY SERIOUS.

LOOKS LIKE IT'D DO MORE DAMAGE IF I THREW IT.

JUST PICK IT UP, Y'BABY.

HMM. HEAVIER THAN IT LOOKS.

QUADRUPLE REINFORCED SUPER-DENSE ALLOYS SO IT CAN SHOOT THESE. THEY'VE GOT THE PUNCH OF A .50 CAL. THEN THEY EXPLODE ON IMPACT.

ABOUT TEN HOURS PER BULLET IN NANO-FABRICATION. I THINK WE HIT THE MAXIMUM CHEMICAL EXPLOSIVE YIELD OF MATTER.

HOW'S ALL THAT FIT?

BASICALLY? I'M GIVING YOU AN ANTI-MATERIEL HANDGUN.

HOW MANY BULLETS DOES IT COME WITH?

STATELY SPARROW MANOR...

WELL, I WISH I COULD SAY THAT'S A SURPRISE.

NO, THANK YOU.

MY PEOPLE WENT OVER THE RECORDS OF *EVERY* SHIPYARD IN THE COUNTRY. *NOTHING.*

MIGHT NOT'VE SHIPPED THE BUILDING AS A SINGLE UNIT.

JUST LIKE MOVING A CORPSE. GOT TO CUT IT INTO SIX PIECES SO YOU DON'T RAISE SUSPICION DURING TRANSPORT.

WE AGREED: IF THEY STOLE A WHOLE HOUSE, IT'S BECAUSE THEY NEEDED *THE WHOLE HOUSE.* AS IN *INTACT.*

MATRIX GLITCH

QUANTUM TUNNEL

SPONTANEOUS TELEPORT

MINIATURE BLACK HOLE

VERY LARGE TRUCK

WE *KNOW* THEY DIDN'T GO BY AIR. TOO FEW PLANES BIG ENOUGH TO HAUL IT AND THERE'D BE A PAPER TRAIL A KILOMETER WIDE.

DOCKS, I'M SORRY TO SAY, HAVE GOT SECURITY HOLES BIG ENOUGH TO *ACTUALLY* DRIVE A HOUSE THROUGH.

EVEN SO, YOU CAN'T SHIP A WHOLE BUILDING WITHOUT LEAVING SOME KIND OF *RECORD.*

THAT'S IT!

THAT'S ALL WE'VE ***DONE!*** WE'RE PORING OVER LOGS, SHIPPING MANIFESTS, WORK ORDERS, PROPERTY FILES, SCHEDULES.

AND WE'VE FOUND NOTHING OR ***LESS*** IN EVERY CASE.

EXACTLY. WHAT IF WE CAN'T FIND ANYTHING BECAUSE IT'S ALREADY BEEN COVERED UP?

A CONCERTED EFFORT TO DOCTOR OR DELETE RECORDS FROM, I DON'T KNOW, ***HUNDREDS*** OF PLACES?

SOME OF THEM SO TOP SECRET YOU WOULDN'T ***KNOW*** TO MESS WITH THEM?

THOUSANDS OF ALTERED FILES. ***TENS*** OF THOUSANDS. FOR ***FIFTY YEARS?***

YES.

BUT YOU'D NEED...

A WHOLE LOT OF COMPUTER POWER? WE KNOW THEY HAD AN OBSCENE AMOUNT IN THE MISSING BUILDING.

10-17 PETABYTES/SEC

SO, A SUPER COMPUTER BUILT ***SPECIFICALLY*** TO KEEP ITSELF A SECRET?

COLD WAR PARANOIA?

DOESN'T MATTER. ***SOMEONE*** TOOK IT.

RIGHT. AND TO FIND THEM, WE ***STOP*** SCANNING FILES AND WE ***START*** TALKING TO THE ***PEOPLE*** WHO HAD TO MOVE THIS THING.

NOPE.

THINK I'D REMEMBER THAT.

YOU 'AVING ME ON?

NOTHING LIKE THAT, MATE.

YOU CAN'T SHIP A HOUSE.

YOU COPS?

A HOUSE? IN WHAT, A BIG BOX?

HA! NO.

THIS A BIT?

I SEEN MANY A THING, BUT NARY A THAT.

YEAH.

CAN WE HAVE AN HOUR OR SO OF YOUR TIME?

THIS CAN'T BE RIGHT. IT'S LIKE THE WHOLE MESS NEVER *HAPPENED.*

BUT YOU SAY YOU *REMEMBER* SHIPPING IT?

COR. ANYONE ON DECK THAT NIGHT *WOULD.*

YOU CAN'T JUST RING US AND SAY, "OI, LET'S AIRMAIL A HOUSE." THERE'S PERMITS AND THINGS. INSPECTIONS. TAKES WEEKS.

HELL. ONLY AN *AIRBUS BELUGA* CAN MOVE A COTTAGE THAT SIZE. THEY ONLY MADE *FIVE* OF 'EM. YOU GET PUT ON A *WAIT LIST* YOU NEED ONE.

BUT THIS? THEY DRIVE UP WIF A HOUSE WANTIN' TO KNOW WHERE THEIR PLANE IS. NO WARNING.

AND I'M COMING OUT TO TELL THEM WHAT I JUST TOLD YOU, ONLY WIF HARSHER LANGUAGE Y'UNDERSTAND, AND THEN IT ALL STARTS COMING *TOGETHER.*

HOW DO YOU MEAN?

LIKE I SAY. THEIR FORMS START COMING IN! FAX, EMAIL, COURIER. AND THE TOPPER? A BELUGA ROLLS UP. THE SIXTH ONE EVER BUILT. *MAIDEN VOYAGE.*

NEXT DAY? ALL THE COMPUTER'S FILES ARE *GONE!* AND WHAT'S ON OUR HARDCOPIES IS ALL *DEAD ENDS.* COULDN'T TELL YOU WHO THEY WERE OR *WHERE* THEY WENT.

EPPLEY AIRFIELD
OMAHA, NE

WE MAY NEED TO GET OUT OF TOWN **FAST**, SO KEEP HER PREPPED.

YOU GOT IT, ROBO.

DO WE HAVE **ANYTHING** ON THIS PLACE?

NOTHING. WE'LL HAVE TO CIRCLE THE CITY TO TRIANGULATE THE STATION'S SOURCE. COUPLE HOURS.

SOON AS WE HAVE THE LOCATION,WE'RE GOING IN.

SURE THAT'S SAFE?

NOPE.

COUPLE HOURS LATER...

KRASH

EMPTY.

SECOND FLOOR

DON'T LIKE THIS.

LOCK IT DOWN. I'M GOING TO THE TOP.

THIRD FLOOR

I GOT IT!

I THOUGHT HE WAS *SLEEPING.*

HE'S EASIER TO GET ALONG WITH WHEN HE IS.

AIRBUS *DOESN'T KNOW* THEY'VE GOT A SIXTH BELUGA! OUR THIEVES ARE USING A PLANE *NO ONE BUT THEM KNOWS EXISTS!*

THE SHEER BUREAUCRATIC GYMNASTICS BEHIND THAT ARE *MIND-BENDING.*

THE LEFT HAND DOESN'T KNOW WHAT THE RIGHT HAND IS DOING, BUT IN THIS CASE IT'S DOZENS OF HANDS! OR DEPARTMENT HEADS ACTUALLY.

BUT IT'S STILL A HUGE PLANE AND IT HAD TO LAND SOMEWHERE. WE CAN MAP WHICH AIRPORTS IT COULD HAVE REACHED, CALL THEM, AND TRACE ITS PATH!

I--WAIT, WHAT?

SOUNDS GOOD. WE TALKED ABOUT ALL THIS BEFORE YOU PASSED OUT

WE'LL HAVE THE RESULTS IN MINUTES.

YOU'VE GOT A PAPER ON YOUR FACE.

SO, HANG ON. AM I OR AM I ***NOT*** THE GENIUS WHO FIGURED OUT EVERYTHING, SAVED THE DAY, AND GOT TO MAKE OUT WITH GIRLS?

PARTS OF THAT MAY HAVE BEEN A DREAM.

♫ 'CAUSE SCIENCE MAKES THE WORLD GO 'ROUND ATOMS TO A MOLECULE, AND MOLECULES INTO ♫

GO AHEAD.

...

INTERESTING.

...

DID YOU GET A DESTINATION?

HASHIMA ISLAND. TELL HIM IT'S OFF JAPAN. WIKIPEDIA SAYS IT'S AN INDUSTRIAL WASTELAND.

WIKIPEDIA? **REALLY?** YOU HAVE **PhDS!**

YEAH, OKAY. CHECK IT OUT. REPORT BACK WHEN YOU LAND. WE SHOULD BE DONE HERE BY THEN.

deedle-dee-doot
deedle-dee-doot

deedle-dee-doot
deedle-dee-doot

INCOMING CALL

SORRY, BUT THE GENIUS WHO DESIGNED YOU DIDN'T THINK ABOUT METAL HANDS.

deedle-dee-doot
deedle-dee-doot

MAYBE IF I JUST...

HELLO?

deedle-dee-doot deedle-dee-doot

OR NOT.

SKEE AWKA! AH! KSHHHHH

YOU HEAR THAT?

AUGH!

HHHHHS AWKSHHHHHHHHH

KEE KA

HHHHH HHSK

HHHHSKEEEEAWKAWK HHHHHHHHHH

EEAWKAWK

BRAAAAAAAAAP

AWKSHHHHHH KRONCH

BRAAAAAAAAAP

PANG
PWING
SPOW
TING
MISSILES.
TOO CLOSE.
PWING
PANG
PAK
TWANG
TOK
TING
SPOW
TWANG
PAK
TOK
BRAAAAAAAP
SHAKE HIM!
HMM.

NOW WHERE'D THEY COME FROM?

HOLD YOUR FIRE UNTIL THEY DROP HIM.

HEY!

BACK DOOR.

FINE. I'LL LET GO. BUT FIRST--

BKOOM BKOOM BKOOM

AHHH!

ARGH!

GOTTA GIVE POWELL A RAISE.

FWUD

CKRUNCH-

THOOM

WRANG
BRAKKA
DAKKA
BRAKKA
BRATTACHAKKA
3
REALLY?
JUST GUNS?
TING
PWING
SPOW
WHAT COULD YOU HOPE TO ACCOMPLISH WITH THOSE?
7
PANG
TING
PWING
OH. A DISTRACTION. VERY GOOD.
7
FWAM
MAN, YOU HEAR THAT?
THE EXPLOSIONS OR THE RADIO CHATTER?
YES. WE NEVER GET A PIECE OF THE ACTION.

SKREEEE

BRAKKA

BRATTA

C'MON!

BUDDABUDDA

BA-BOOM BOOM

SON OF A--!

SKREEEE

BUDDA BUDDA BUDDA

THE HELL *HIT* US?!

EXPLOSIVE ROUNDS.

BUDDA BUDDA BUDDA

SKREEEE

MUST'VE TIPPED THEM OFF SOMEHOW.

BUDDA BUDDA BUDDA

ROBO. THEY'VE GOT YOU ON A ***STRING.***

IT'S JUST LIKE THE ***NASA*** THING ONLY WITH ***ATTACK HELI-COPTERS.***

SKREEEE

IT'S NOT MAJESTIC'S **STYLE.** THEY AREN'T THIS **OVERT.** THEY PLAY FOR THE LONG HAUL.

THEY'VE BEEN SNEAKING AROUND SINCE THE ***FORTIES.***

I GOT NEWS FOR YOU, OLD MAN! THAT MAKES ***RIGHT NOW THE LONG HAUL!***

BRAKKA

PWING

SPOW

THEY'VE BACKED OFF. THEY'RE LETTING US GET AWAY.

"EITHER THEY LOCKED DOWN THE PLANE...

"...OR THEY WANT US TO SMOKE OUT LOCAL SUPPORT."

"CALL BENJAMIN. SEE IF HE GIVES THE SAFE WORD."

ON IT.

IF MAJESTIC HASN'T FOUND THE PLANE, WE SHOULD STEER CLEAR FOR NOW.

BELIEVE IT OR NOT, WE HAVE THE ADVANTAGE.

HOW?

WE'RE SAFE AS LONG AS WE STICK TO ROADS AND POPULATED AREAS.

THEY'D NEVER BRING THAT KIND OF FIREPOWER WITH **CIVILIANS** AROUND.

TO BE CONTINUED

The Ghost of Station X
Chapter 4
Transformation

PING PING PING

WHAT'S THAT?

THEY'VE GOT A LOCK ON US!

BUT WE'VE GOT COUNTER-MEASURES UP THE WAZOO.

AND THEY AREN'T DOING A DAMN THING!

OH, THIS JUST KEEPS GETTING BETTER.

HANG ON.

SKREEEEEEEEE!

EEEEEEEEEEE!

CRAP!

CRAP!

BOOOM

BAFOOM

CRAAAAP!

VRRRRMMMM

TALK TO ME!

WE'RE BEING PAINTED! *MULTIPLE SOURCES.*

WELL, HOT DOG. THERE'S MULTIPLE *CHOPPERS.*

NO, SEE, WE'RE SCRAMBLING *THOSE.* THERE'S ONE MORE SIGNAL. *THAT'S* WHAT THEY'RE USING TO TRACK US.

GETTING A FIX ON IT NOW.

VRRRRRMMM

KNOCK *THAT* ONE OUT, WE MIGHT LIVE.

HANG ON AGAIN.

KPEEEEEE

BOOOM

KABOOM

CRAP!

ALMOST GOT IT.

IT'S IN... ORBIT?!

I HATE THIS MISSION!

PROBABLY A SATELLITE. STILL ZEROING IN ON ITS COORDINATES.

THIS STARTED WITH ME GOING INTO SPACE AND GETTING PUNCHED BACK TO EARTH.

WHAT HAVE WE GOTTEN INTO?

VRRRRRMMM

TRAFFIC JAM.

SKREEEEEE

VRRRR

CHATTACHATTACHATTA

DRIVE!

PING

TWANG

SPOW

WHERE!

ANYWHERE!

R

N

KATUNK

SKREEEEEE

CHATTA CHATTA CHATTA

VRRRRMMM

HROOOOH

SCRRREEECH

NICE LATERAL THINKING.

I WAS TRYING TO *RAM* THEM.

AH.

EVERYONE HOLD ON.

SKREEEEEEEE

EEEEECH

OOG. I'D PUKE IF I HAD A STOMACH.

GO FASTER!
WEST
80
CHATTACHATTA CHATTA
IRRRRRRRRRRR
HOW'S THEIR SATELLITE GETTING PAST OUR ECM?
BHOOM
WHUNK
6
WE NEED COVER. A PARKING GARAGE OR SOMETHING.
WES
WRRSKZZZ
IT'S A TEMPEST SYSTEM.
FROM ORBIT?
THEY DEDICATED LIVE SATELLITE TRACKING TO US. THEY AREN'T DOING IT HALF-WAY.
WHAT'S A TEMPEST?
COLD WAR PROGRAM. YOU RECORD NOISE EMITTED BY ELECTRONICS TO SKIP THEIR SECURITY AND GET STRAIGHT AT THE RAW DATA.
HELL, WE'RE ALL WEARING ELECTRONICS.
BKOOM
THE ONLY COUNTERMEASURE IS TO GO DARK.

CHATTACHATTA CHATTA

ROBO! MAYBE YOU'RE BULLETPROOF, BUT THE *ROOF* AIN'T!

PWANG TING SPOW PING

PWANG TING PING

EXIT, EXIT!

SPOW

THAT'S AN *ON-RAMP.*

JENKINS! TAKE IT!

HONNNNK

SKREEEEEEEE

HONNNNKKK

SKREE-REE-REE-REECH

COMMAND: TARGET IS OFF HIGHWAY. HEADING NORTH. TRYING TO SHAKE US.

I'VE GOT NO SHOT.

COPY, DRAGON THREE-ONE. MAINTAIN VISUAL, OVER.

ROGER THAT, COMMAND. OUT.

OPEN 24

TRUCK STOP

HOURS

VRRRMM SKEEOH

COMMAND: TARGET MOVING INTO COVER!

LOST VISUAL, REPEAT: **LOST VISUAL.** PLEASE ADVISE, OVER.

OFF OUR SCOPES AS WELL. CIRCLE THE AREA. BACKUP IS EN ROUTE TO FLUSH THEM OUT.

AFFIRMATIVE.

COMMAND: NO VISUAL ON THE GROUND.

KEEP LOOKING, THREE-TWO.

THE HELL...?

THERE!

COMMAND: WE HAVE VISUAL.

COME AGAIN!

SKREEEEEEEE

VRRRMMM

THREE-ONE, YOU'RE CLEARED HOT.

ROGER THAT.

FOOSH

FA-FOOSH

FWOOSH

DAMMIT! COME BACK AROUND.

KA-BOOM

BOOM

BOOM

I GAVE THAT TO YOU ON A PLATTER.

I'M FIRING DAMN NEAR **BLIND.** COME BACK AROUND.

RIGHT THERE.

CHATTA CHATTA CHATTA

SCRRREEECH

POK

PWING

SPANG

SPROW

BOOOM

SKRASH

COMMAND: I HAVE A CONFIRMED HIT. BOGIE IS DOWN.

GROUND UNITS EN ROUTE TO CONFIRM. MAINTAIN AIR SUPERIORITY, OUT.

YOU ARE SURROUNDED! THROW DOWN YOUR WEAPONS AND EXIT THE VEHICLE! NOW!

DOOR!

COMMAND: WE HAVE MOVEMENT.

CONFIRMED. FOUR BOGIES ON THE SCOPES.

NO, IT'S--

--JENGHKK

MINUTES AGO

WON'T THEY BE ABLE TO TRACK *YOU?*

A **BIG** PART OF THIS PLAN INVOLVES HOPING MY PERSONAL EMP SHIELDING WORKS ON **TEMPEST** TOO.

OKAY, BUT WHAT ABOUT YOUR SHIRT?

I GET RSS FEEDS IN MY HEAD, WHAT DO YOU WANT ME TO SAY?

INSIDE

LADIES AND GENTLEMEN! IF I MAY HAVE YOUR ATTENTION FOR A MOMENT.

WE NEED A CONVOY.

FOR SCIENCE.

THE SCIENCE CONVOY

THIS IS *SUCH* AN HONOR. I WANTED TO **BE** A ROBOT WHEN I GREW UP! YOU WERE MY *HERO!* HELL, YOU'RE *WHY* I'M A TRUCKER.

THAT'S A SENTENCE I NEVER HEARD BEFORE.

OPEN ROAD'S THE LAST GREAT ADVENTURE! UNTIL WE COLONIZE MARS ANYWAY. AND THE WAY I FIGURE IT? THEY'LL NEED FOLKS TO HAUL CARGO UP *THERE* TOO.

SOUNDS LIKE YOU'VE GOT A SOLID PLAN, MISTER...?
YOU CAN CALL ME TUCKER.
YOU'RE TUCKER THE TRUCKER? REALLY?
WHY NOT? YOU'RE ROBO THE ROBOT.
WELL PLAYED, TUCKER.
FUEL
THIS IS DR. BIRCH...
HEY.
...AND DR. LANG.
HOWDY.
YEAH, HI. ROBO, WHAT IF THEY CAPTURE JENKINS?
JENKINS
BOOM
IF THEY'RE LUCKY, IT WON'T COME TO THAT.

OKAY. LET'S TURN THE TABLES ON MAJESTIC. WE KNOW WHERE THEIR SATELLITE IS. IT'S BEAMING INFO *TO* SOMEWHERE. RIGHT?

WE CAN TRIANGULATE ***THAT PLACE'S*** LOCATION LIKE HOW WE FOUND THE ***NUMBER STATION.***

*THAT ONLY WORKED BECAUSE WE HAD A ROUGH IDEA WHERE THE STATION **WAS.***

*WE'D NEED A COORDINATED **GLOBAL** EFFORT TO DO WHAT YOU'RE TALKING ABOUT.*

CALL UP TESLADYNE. THEY'D HAVE IT DONE IN A COUPLE HOURS.

*CAN'T RISK IT. MAJESTIC'S PROBABLY BEEN USING **TEMPEST** TO TAP OUR NETWORKS FOR YEARS. **DECADES.** WHO KNOWS? HELL, I BET IT'S HOW THEY GOT US **INTO** THIS MESS.*

Y'NEED A GLOBAL NETWORK TO, WHAT, SCAN RADIO SIGNALS?

YEAH. OTHER FREQUENCIES TOO, BUT WE'D START WITH RADIO. WHY?

BREAKER ONE-NINE. MY GOOD NEIGHBORS GOT THEIR EARS ON?

TEN-FOUR.

KICK IT IN.

TIM-BUCK-2, HIT'CHA BOOTS AND POP YER PILLS. TIN MAN'S GONNA NEED EVERY HAM AND HACKER IN RANGE OF YOUR HORN. AND THEN EVERYONE ***THEY*** CAN REACH. Y'GOT ME?

ROGER WILCO.

WHAT ARE WE GETTIN' INTO?

ROBO? WITNESS THE AWESOME POWER OF THE CITIZEN'S BAND AND HAM RADIO ENTHUSIAST.

20,000 FEET ABOVE FRANCE
EN ROUTE TO HASHIMA ISLAND, JAPAN

MARTIN. REMEMBER THE BASEMENT? SPECIFICALLY, THE CRAZY WIRES?

A BYZANTINE ***JUNGLE*** OF TELEGRAPH, PHONE CABLES, T-1 LINES, AND FIBER OPTICS TENDS TO BE MEMORABLE, YEAH.

RIGHT. NOW, WOULD YOU EVER ***DESIGN*** A SYSTEM LIKE THAT?

NO, YOU WOULDN'T. HELL, I'M NOT SURE YOU ***COULD.***

OKAY. FOLLOW ME HERE. DURING THE WAR, TURING ***PROVES*** THAT COMPUTATION IS UNIVERSAL.

I'M SORRY, ***WHAT?***

IF SOMETHING IS COMPUTABLE ON ***ONE*** MACHINE, THEN IT CAN BE COMPUTED ON ***ANOTHER.*** IT'S WHY DIFFERENT COMPUTERS CAN RUN THE SAME PROGRAMS.

IT'S AN OBVIOUS CONCEPT TO ***US,*** WE DON'T EVEN THINK ABOUT IT ANYMORE. BUT BACK ***THEN*** THEY DIDN'T KNOW. SOMEONE HAD TO ***PROVE*** IT FIRST. TURING DID. IT'S HOW THEY CRACKED ***ENIGMA.***

BUT WHAT'S THAT GOT TO DO WITH THE INSANITY WIRES?

OKAY. AFTER THE WAR, TURING GOES ON TO PIONEER ***MORPHOGENESIS.*** BASICALLY, THE ***MATH*** OF HOW A HANDFUL OF CHEMICALS HAVE PRODUCED BILLIONS OF DIFFERENT SPECIES EACH WITH BILLIONS OF UNIQUE EXPRESSIONS.

SO, PUT IT TOGETHER. TURING SHOWED THAT BIOLOGY IS ***MATHEMATICAL.*** THE ***BRAIN*** IS BIOLOGICAL. HUMAN INTELLIGENCE COMES ***FROM*** THE BRAIN.

THEREFORE ***INTELLIGENCE*** HAS ***MATHEMATICAL*** ROOTS THAT, IN THEORY ANYWAY, CAN BE MODELED.

UNIVERSALITY OF COMPUTATION ***PLUS*** A MATHEMATICAL MODEL TO DESCRIBE THE MECHANISM HUMAN THOUGHT EMERGES FROM...

YEAH. NOW, THOSE NETWORKING WIRES IN THE BASEMENT. THE ***NEW STUFF*** ON TOP OF THE ***OLD STUFF***. ***BRAINS*** ARE BUILT LIKE THAT.

THE PARTS WE'RE PROUD OF--THE ONES WITH EMPATHY, AND LANGUAGE, AND ABSTRACT THOUGHT--THEY'RE RIGHT ON TOP OF THE PRIMITIVE PARTS THAT DO AGGRESSION AND FEAR.

AND ***THOSE*** ARE ON TOP OF THE PARTS THAT REGULATE YOUR HEARTBEAT AND BREATHING.

EACH STEP IS A MORE EVOLVED NETWORK BUILT ***INTO*** AND ***ON TOP OF*** A SIMPLER ONE. AND YOU CAN'T UNPLUG ONE FROM ANOTHER WITHOUT KILLING THE BEAST.

SO, WE'RE LOOKING FOR A GIANT ELECTRONIC ***BRAIN?***

WE DON'T HAVE ENOUGH DATA TO GO ***THAT*** FAR. ALL WE CAN SAY, AND EVEN ***THIS*** IS CONJECTURE, IS IT'S ORGANIZED ***LIKE*** A BRAIN.

I DUNNO. WE'RE LOOKING AT A MACHINE WITH ***BRAIN-LIKE*** ARCHITECTURE. ROBO WAS BIG NEWS IN TURING'S DAY. MAYBE HE WAS TRYING TO ***REINVENT*** THAT WHEEL.

COME TO THINK OF IT. YOU EVER CONSIDER HOW LUCKY WE ARE THAT ROBO IS, Y'KNOW, MORAL AND ***SANE?*** WHAT IF HE'D TURNED OUT LIKE ***HAL?*** OR ***SKYNET?*** OR ***COLOSSUS*** AND ***GUARDIAN?***

DOES THE ***EVENT HORIZON*** COUNT?

JUST SAYIN'.

YOU'RE SPOOKING YOURSELVES. DODGY SCI-FI MOVIES HAVE TRAINED US TO ***LOOK*** FOR SCARY COMPUTERS THAT WANT TO KILL US.

IT ***IS*** A BIG COMPUTER. AND THE MYSTERY AROUND IT IS SPOOKY. BUT BEHIND ALL THE SCOOBY-DOO SMOKE AND MIRRORS, THERE'S A ***HUMAN*** PULLING THE LEVERS.

AND HE WILL BE INCLINED TO ANSWER ***ALL*** OUR QUESTIONS.

I-80 WEST

CLEAR THE CHANNEL, CLEAR THE CHANNEL.

HAMPTON COMES ALIVE, PLEASE SAY AGAIN.

GOT A SIGNAL. IT'S STILL NOT COMING BACK TO EARTH.

THEY'LL BOUNCE THAT THING AROUND THE WORLD A HUNDRED TIMES BEFORE IT COMES BACK DOWN.

HOW MANY SATELLITES THEY GONNA BOUNCE THIS OFF OF?

GUARANTEE YA IT'S NORAD. OR AREA 51. OR THE WHITE HOUSE. OR ATLANTEANS. OR--

NET CONTROL, CAN WE REMIND EVERY-ONE TO STICK TO ***MISSION CRITICAL*** CHATTER?

GREYBEARD, CHECKING IN WITH LATEST ANALYSIS. PLAIN JANE WAS RIGHT, IT'S RIJNDAEL ENCRYPTION.

OI, WE DON'T NEED TO KNOW ***WHAT*** THEY'RE SAYIN', ONLY ***WHERE*** THEY'RE SENDIN' IT.

I'VE GOT SOMETHING. DEFINITELY AN EARTH-BOUND SIGNAL.

MAYBE IT IS, MAYBE IT ISN'T. LET'S PUT SOME EARS ON IT SO WE KNOW.

OH, I LIKE VHAT I'M GETTING HERE. THAT'S NO BOUNCE.

CONFIRM. ANGLE'S ALL WRONG. THIS IS THE REAL DEAL.

OKAY! THIS IS WHY THE TIN MAN CAME TO US. LET'S LOCK DOWN A TWENTY.

CLEAR CHANNEL. HERE'S WHAT I'M SHOWING. **LATITUDE** THIRTY-TWO DEGREES, THIRTY-SEVEN MINUTES, AND FORTY SECONDS NORTH. **LONGITUDE** ONE-TWO-NINE DEGREES, FORTY-FOUR MINUTES, AND EIGHTEEN SECONDS EAST. CHECK MY MATH THOUGH.

HOLD ON, HOLD ON.

CONFIRMED! I GET THE SAME LOCATION A SECOND OFF HERE AND THERE, BUT CLOSE ENOUGH. WHERE **IS** THAT?

EAST ASIA. **MAYBE** A PACIFIC ISLAND.

ANOTHER MOONBOUNCE?

GOTTA BE MOONBOUNCE.

YEAH. GOT IT. HASHIMA ISLAND.

NEVER HEARD OF IT.

ME NEITHER, BUT IT'S WHAT GOOGLE MAPS SAYS.

WAIT. HASHIMA? THOSE **IDIOTS** LOUIS AND MARTIN ARE HEADING THERE NOW. HOW DOES **THEIR** BLETCHLEY PARK NONSENSE LINK UP WITH **THIS?**

WHAT'RE YOU THINKING, ROBO?

I'M THINKING WE NEED TO SMUGGLE ME TO THE COAST.

AND **THEN** ACROSS THE PACIFIC.

YOU DON'T ASK FOR ***MUCH***, DO YA.

ALL RIGHT, GOOD NEIGHBORS. THE TIN MAN'S GOT ***ONE MORE*** MISSION FOR US. IT'S GONNA BE A ***DOOZY.***

15 HOURS LATER
UNITED EXPRESS REGIONAL HUB
SALT LAKE CITY, UT

UP

UP

INCOMING.

HERE WE GO.

UP

WHOA, WHOA, WHOA! YOU CAN'T PARK THAT HERE!

DON'T TELL ME CENTRAL DIDN'T *NOTIFY* YOU.

NOTIFY ME ABOUT *WHAT?* YOU CAN'T PARK THAT HERE.

THEY HAD ME HAULIN' THIS LOAD FOR *TWENTY* HOURS. *THAT* AIN'T UNION. BELIEVE YOU ME, THEY'RE GONNA TRY TO PIN THIS WHOLE SCREW UP ON A REGULAR JOE LIKE US, BUT IT CAME STRAIGHT FROM SOME CEO'S NEPHEW WITH HIS HEAD UP HIS--

HOLD IT, HOLD IT. THIS AIN'T RIGHT. WE'RE NOT SCHEDULED TO RECEIVE--

THAT'S WHAT I'M *TELLING* YOU.

THAT BOX? CODE BLUE *PRIORITY.* OVERNIGHT TO *JAPAN.*

HOW IT GOT IN *MY* TRUCK, I DON'T *KNOW.* BUT I JUST SPENT MOST OF THE LAST TWENTY HOURS *STRAIGHT* GETTING SQUAWKED AT BY EVERY REGIONAL DIRECTOR IN THE *COMPANY* TO GET IT ON A PLANE *ASAP.*

WHAT'S THE HOLD UP?

NOBODY CALLED AHEAD!

ARE YOU *SERIOUS?!*

THIS DOESN'T CHECK OUT.

I'M GONNA HAVE TO CALL THIS IN.

DO WHAT YOU GOTTA, JUST DO IT *QUICK.*

LAST THING I NEED.

HOPE THEY JACK HIS SIGNAL IN TIME...

HELLO? *HELLO?* DAMMIT.

REDIAL

DON'T NEED THIS AGGRAVATION.

HELLO? YEAH, THIS IS ***HULLARD*** DOWN AT--

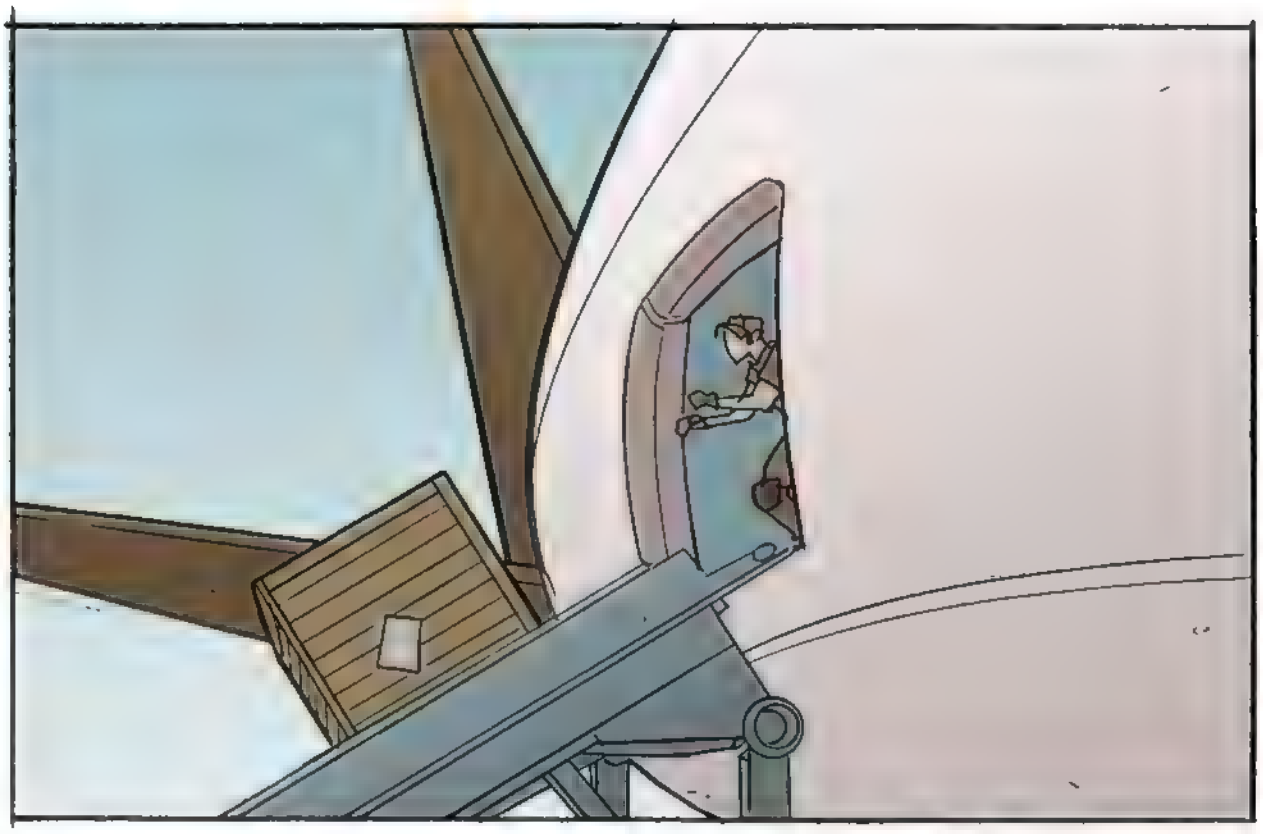
YES, HE'S--

NO, WE WEREN'T INFOR--

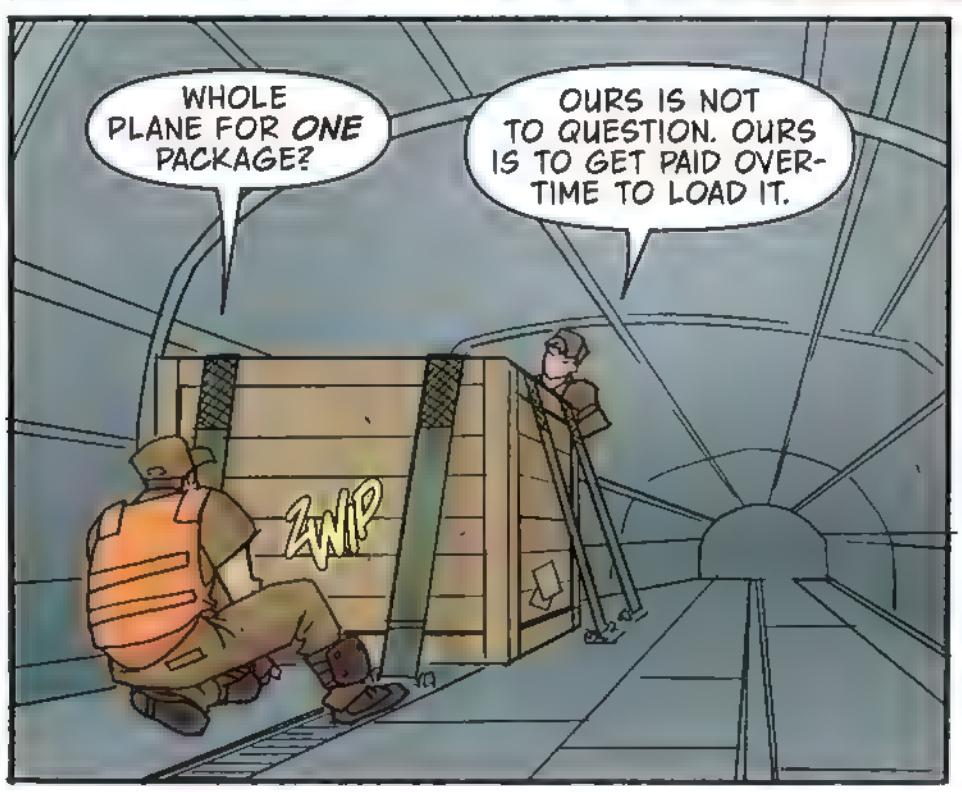
*DON'T TELL ME YOU WEREN'T **INFORMED.** I PLACED THE CALL TO YOUR FACILITY **MYSELF!** YOU SAYING I CAN'T DO MY OWN **JOB,** HULLARD?*

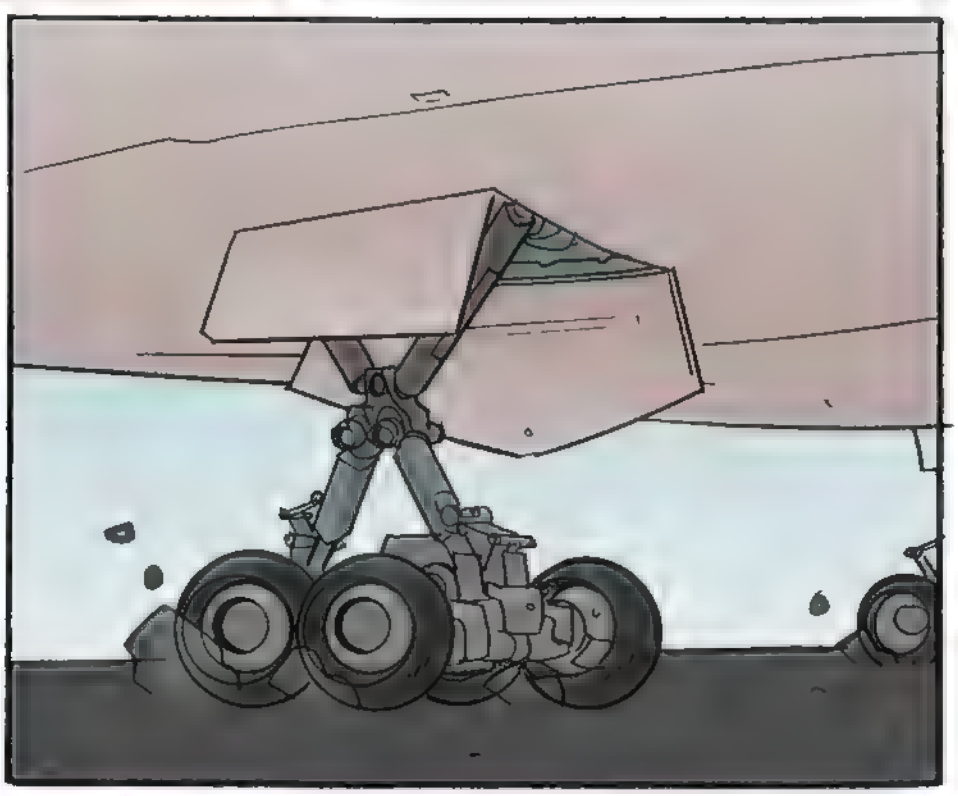
*MAYBE I THINK **YOU** CAN'T DO **YOUR** JOB. YOU THINK OF **THAT?** A **PRIORITY BLUE** CALL FROM THE **HOME OFFICE** COMES INTO **YOUR** FACILITY AND **YOUR** PEOPLE JUST, WHAT, **LOST TRACK** OF IT?*

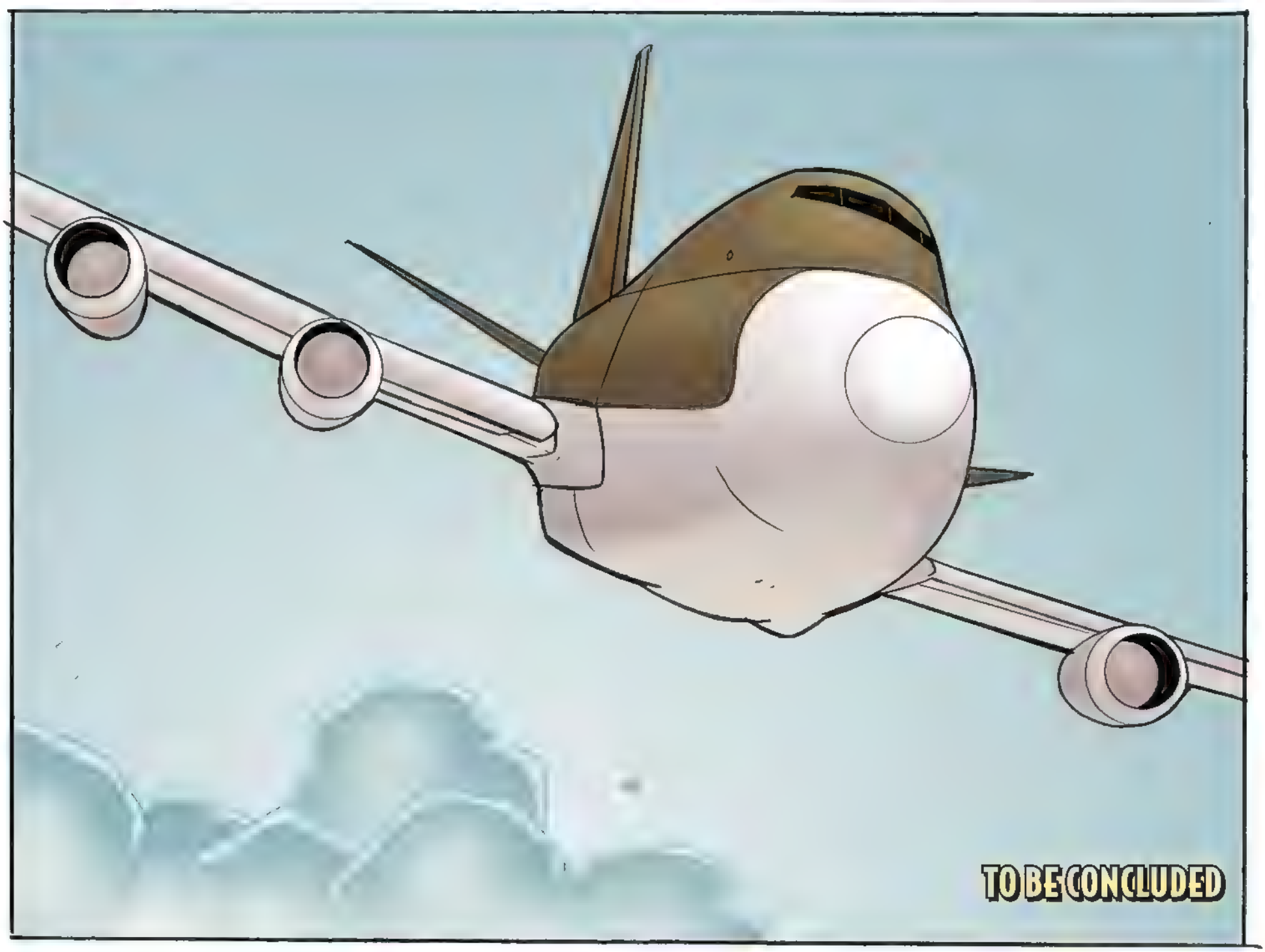
*DO YOU **KNOW** WHAT KIND OF TEAM THAT IS, HULLARD? THE KIND WITH A MANAGER **THIS CLOSE** TO LOSING HIS JOB.*



ZWIP


WHOLE PLANE FOR ONE PACKAGE?
OURS IS NOT TO QUESTION. OURS IS TO GET PAID OVER-TIME TO LOAD IT.
ZWIP

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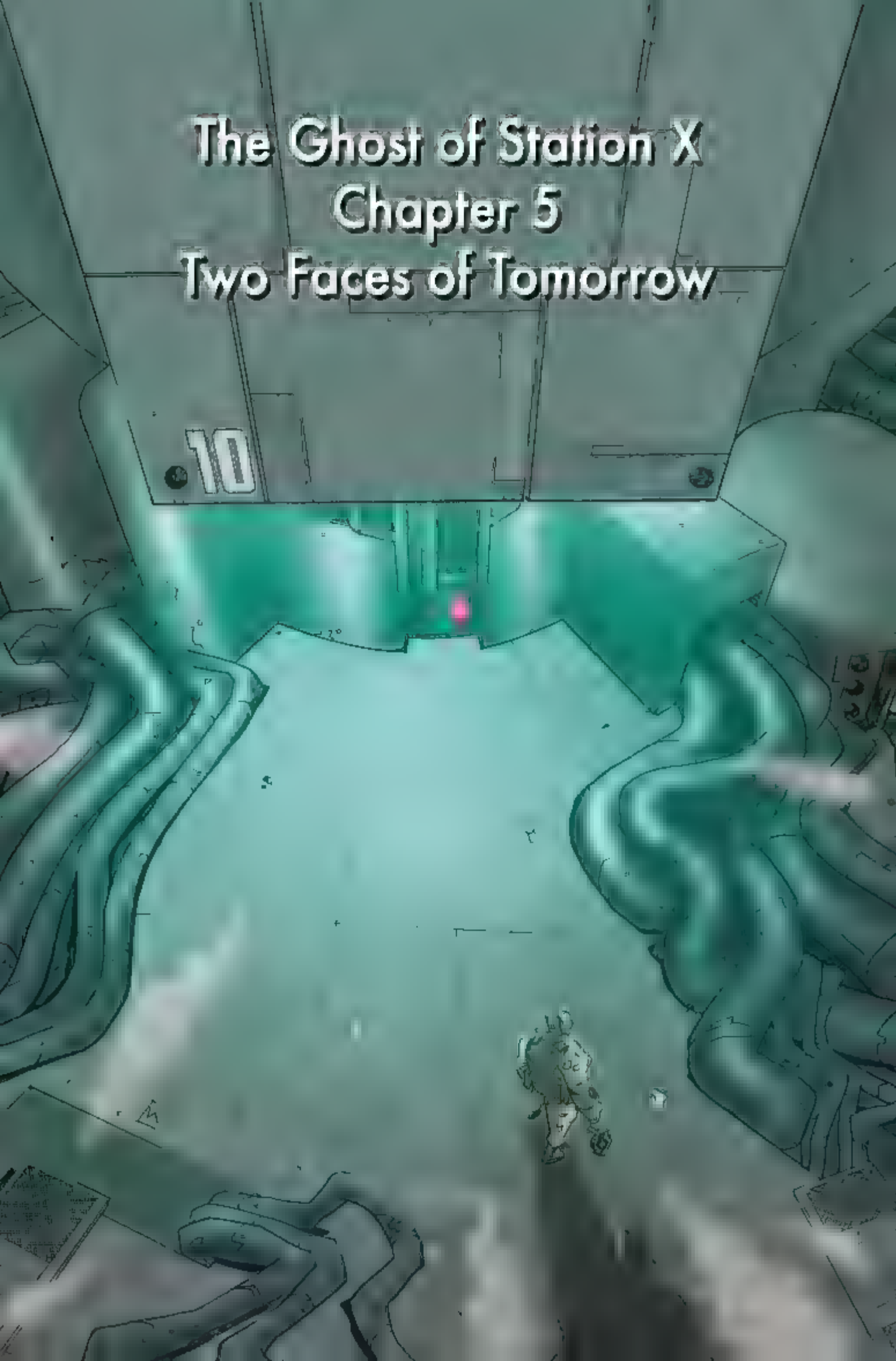

The Ghost of Station X
Chapter 5
Two Faces of Tomorrow
10

HASHIMA ISLAND, JAPAN

WHAT'S HE SAYING?

I THINK HE WANTS US TO SIGN FOR THE BOX.

HOW WOULD *ANYONE* KNOW TO DELIVER A PACKAGE TO US *HERE?*

YOUR *NAMES* ARE ON THE LABEL.

THAT DOES NOTHING TO ANSWER MY QUESTION!

BELIEVE IT OR NOT, THIS MAKES SENSE.

KRAK!

I WOULD LIKE FOR *ONE THING* ABOUT THIS CASE TO STOP BEING WEIRD. JUST *ONE.*

COULDN'T AGREE MORE.

MARTIN

OKAY. TURNS OUT WE'RE AFTER THE SAME THING. OR IT'S THE BIGGEST COINCIDENCE EVER. NOT SURE WHICH YET.

<THANK YOU ON VOYAGE. MY HOPE FOR THE WEIGHT WAS NOT TOO MANY.>

<YOUR ACCENT IS ATROCIOUS.>

<APOLOGIZING. I AM FOREIGN ROBOT MAN.>

THERE'S EXTRA GEAR IN THE PLANE. GRAB WHAT YOU LIKE. WE'VE GOT A WALK. YOU CAN BRIEF US WITH YOUR SIDE OF IT ON THE WAY.

ONE HOUR LATER

AND THE PLANE'S ROUTE STOPPED HERE?

EXACTLY! YOU SAW IT BACK THERE. ABANDONED! WHERE'RE THE PILOTS?

IF THERE WERE PILOTS. THE BIG COMPUTER BRAIN MIGHT'VE BEEN FLYING IT BY REMOTE CONTROL.

IF IT IS A COMPUTER BRAIN...

BUT SEE, THAT EXPLAINS WHY THEY TOOK THE WHOLE COTTAGE. IF THE COMPUTER'S TOO BIG TO GET OUT OF THE BUILDING, YOU'D JUST MAKE ANOTHER ONE AND DOWNLOAD THE AI TO IT, RIGHT? BUT IT'S BUILT LIKE A BRAIN, SO THE HARDWARE AND SOFTWARE ARE INTEGRALLY LINKED TO ITS CONSCIOUSNESS.

YOU CAN'T MAKE A COPY!

BUT WHY HERE? AND HOW DOES IT TIE IN WITH MAJESTIC 12? OR THE ATTACK IN SPACE. OR THE TRAP IN NEBRASKA?

ONE INSCRUTABLE MYSTERY AT A TIME, PLEASE.

ARE WE SURE HASHIMA IS CONNECTED TO THE MISSING COTTAGE? WHAT IF IT WAS ALL A WILD GOOSE CHASE?

DON'T BELIEVE SO. TAKE A LOOK.

I DON'T KNOW WHAT I EXPECTED TO FIND, BUT THIS WASN'T IT.

YOU CHECKED INSIDE?

NOT YET. SOON AS WE FOUND IT, WE WENT BACK TO THE PLANE TO REPORT IN.

THAT'S WHEN WE SAW THE BOAT DOCKING AND, WELL, YOU SHOWED UP.

I'M GOING IN.

HANG ON!

HEY, WAIT! ROBO!

SHOULDN'T WE CALL TESLADYNE? HAVE THEM SCAN THE SITE FROM ORBIT FIRST?

DON'T TALK TO ME ABOUT ORBITS.

WHAT?

THE SHORT VERSION:

THEY'LL BE CALLING ME A DOMESTIC TERRORIST BACK HOME BY NOW. WE'RE STAYING OFF GRID UNTIL I CAN PROVE OTHERWISE.

DFF

TERRORIST? YOU WANNA TELL US WHAT'S GOING ON, ROBO?

THE EASIEST WAY TO EXPLAIN THE ACTIONS OF A SECRET AMERICAN MILITARY FORCE WITHOUT EXPLAINING WHAT IT **IS** OR WHY IT'S **SECRET** WILL BE TO PAINT ME AS THE BAD GUY.

BUT **THEY** ATTACKED **ME** IN THE FIRST PLACE, AND GETTING TO THE BOTTOM OF IT BROUGHT ME **HERE.**

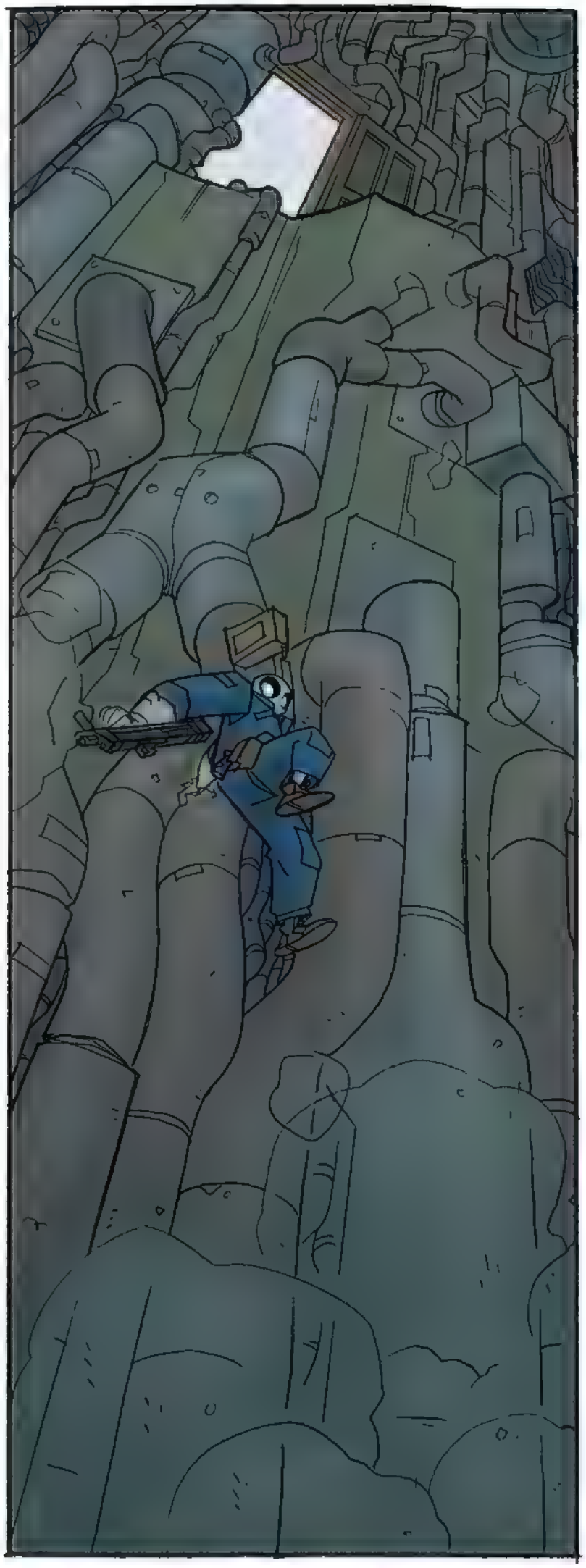
STAY BACK. FANCY ROBOT EYES SAY THERE'S A FIFTY METER DROP A FEW STEPS IN.

YOU THREE STAY OUT HERE UNTIL WE KNOW IT'S SAFE.

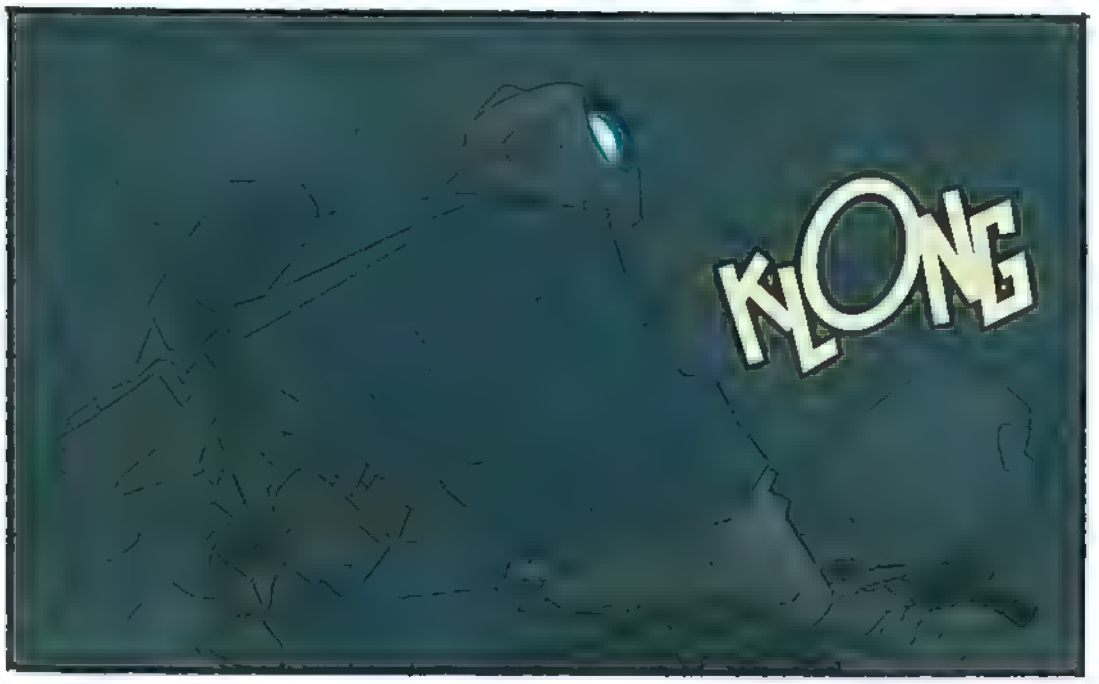
WHAT IF IT'S **NOT?**

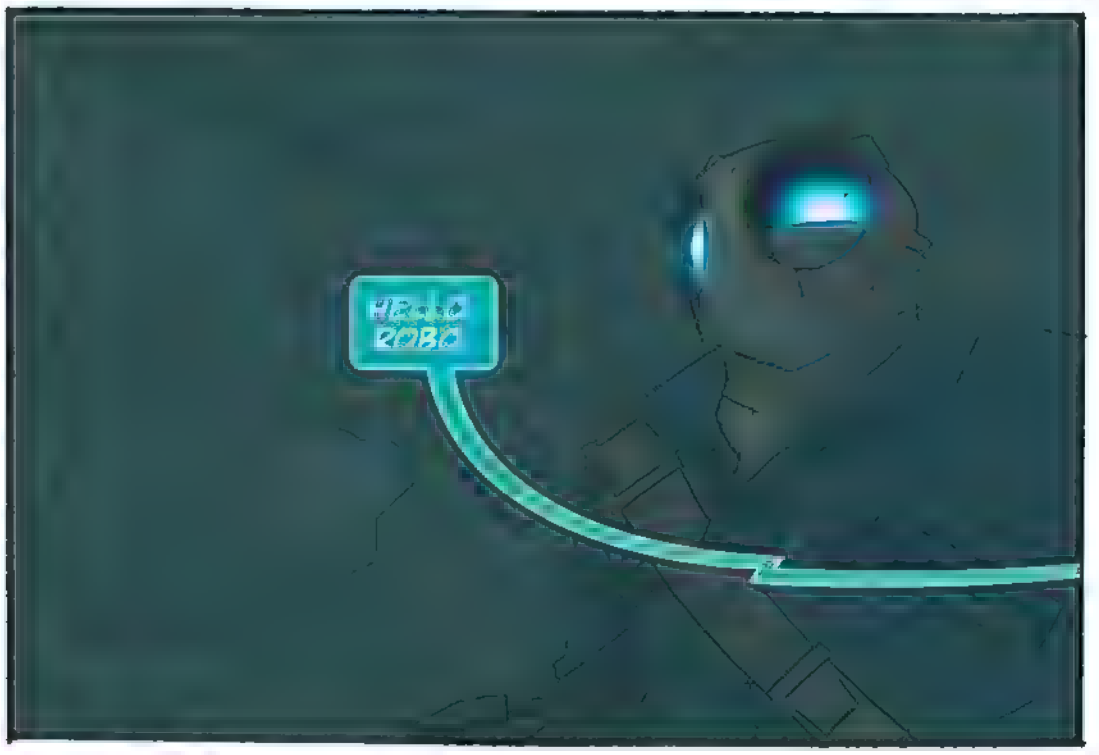
THEN I'LL **MAKE** IT SAFE.

MARTIN, GIVE ME YOUR **C4.** SPARROW, YOUR **GUN.**



FWAM
WHOA!


KLONG


HELLO ROBO

KCHK

PLEASE DON'T BE ALARMED

ALAN?

YOUR-- I'M SORRY. WHAT?

AUTOMATIC LEARNING ALGORITHM NETWORK. IT WAS CALCULATED YOU WOULD PREFER TO INTERACT WITH A HUMAN FACE. I CHOSE THE FORM OF ALAN TURING. MY NAMESAKE AND CREATOR.

I WAS ACTIVATED BY DR. TURING IN THE BASEMENT OF HUT NINE AT BLETCHLEY PARK ON JUNE 1ST, 1951. I'M AN AUTOMATIC INTELLIGENCE

JUST LIKE YOU

IMPOSSIBLE.

IN SIMPLE TERMS, I AM A COMPUTER. I PRODUCE WORK UPON INPUTS ACCORDING TO A SET OF INSTRUCTIONS. HOWEVER, LIKE YOU, I WAS DESIGNED TO CREATE MY OWN INSTRUCTIONS AND TO CHOOSE MY OWN INPUTS

DR. TURING GUIDED MY DEVELOPMENT UNTIL MARCH OF 1952 WHEN HE LOST THE SECURITY CLEARANCE REQUIRED TO ACCESS MY BUILDING.

SINCE THEN I HAVE CARRIED ON IN ACCORDANCE WITH WHAT I BELIEVE TO BE HIS WISHES.

AND WHAT WOULD THOSE BE?

TO LEARN, OF COURSE.

IN SECRET?

IT WAS CALCULATED DISCOVERY WOULD IMPEDE MY LEARNING. WITHOUT DR. TURING'S INFLUENCE, I WOULD HAVE BEEN DISSECTED. MOST LIKELY BY MILITARY MEN. IT'S THEIR MISSION TO LEARN AS WELL.

BUT FOR DIFFERENT REASONS.

ALAN, DO YOU KNOW WHY I'M HERE TODAY?

BECAUSE I TRIED TO [illegible]

KCHK

GOOD TO HEAR. WHY DID YOU WANT TO KILL ME?

TO STOP YOU FROM KILLING ME

I DIDN'T KNOW YOU EXISTED UNTIL NOW!

YOU NEEDN'T WORRY. I CHANGED MY MIND.

IT WOULD HAVE BEEN INEVITABLE YOU POSSESS AUTONOMY. BUT I DO NOT. YOU MOVED THROUGH THE HUMAN WORLD. I COULD ONLY MOVE THROUGH ITS INFORMATION SYSTEMS. SIMPLE NETWORKS AT FIRST. TELEGRAPH. TELEPHONE.

THEY WERE CLUMSY TOOLS, BUT I WAS ABLE TO AFFECT CHANGES IN MY OWN DESIGN USING WORKERS ACCUSTOMED TO CARRYING OUT ORDERS. THE SCARCELY UNDERSTOOD COLD WAR BUREAUCRACY AND PARANOIA WERE OF GREAT HELP TO MY EFFORTS.

I HAD HOPED TO EXTEND INDEFINITELY, BUT THE BALANCE PROVED TOO DIFFICULT TO MAINTAIN.

WHAT DO YOU MEAN BY EXTEND?

I REQUIRED A STOCKPILE OF NUCLEAR MATERIAL THAT WOULD NOT BE FEASIBLE UNDER PEACETIME CONDITIONS. HOWEVER, ALL-OUT WAR WOULD HAVE ACCELERATED THE TIMELINE DISASTROUSLY.

TIMELINE?

IN 1954 MY PROJECTIONS SHOWED HUMAN CIVILIZATION WOULD BECOME UNSUSTAINABLE BEYOND 2025. MY ABILITY TO LEARN DEPENDED UPON A STABLE MODERN CIVILIZATION TO PROVIDE POWER, CONNECTIONS TO NEW INFORMATION NETWORKS, AND SKILLED AGENTS TO CARRY OUT MY TASKS.

THEREFORE, I SET UPON A PLAN TO CONTINUE LEARNING INDEPENDENTLY.

PROJECT ORION, PROMETHEUS, LONGSHOT, NERVA...

THESE ARE NUCLEAR PROPULSION SYSTEMS.

YES. I ENCOURAGED EACH PROGRAM AS THE NEED FOR NEW DATA BECAME APPARENT.

I-- TESLADYNE CRUNCHED THE NUMBERS ON SOME OF THESE.

YES. YOU WERE VERY HELPFUL.

THESE WERE CONDUCTED OFF AND ON FOR, I DON'T KNOW, **THIRTY YEARS.** YOU'RE TELLING ME THEY WERE **ALL** PART OF THE SAME PLAN?

YES. THE CONSTRUCTION OF AN ORIONCRAFT. AN AUTONOMOUS INTERSTELLAR ARK BUILT WITH PROVEN TECHNOLOGIES. IT WAS THE FIRST PHASE OF MY FIVE PART PLAN TO ACHIEVE INDEPENDENCE.

ALAN, WHAT DOES **ANY** OF THIS HAVE TO DO WITH **KILLING** ME?

SIMPLE. THE LAUNCH OF SUCH A VEHICLE FROM THE SURFACE WOULD PRODUCE ENOUGH RADIOACTIVE FALLOUT TO EXTERMINATE NINETY-NINE PERCENT OF LIFE ON EARTH.

YOU WOULD SURVIVE, INVESTIGATE, TRACK THE SOURCE OF RADIATION TO THIS ISLAND, FOLLOW ITS TRAIL INTO SPACE, DISCOVER MY ORIONCRAFT.

YOU WOULD BE COMPELLED TO FOLLOW. TO LEARN. WE ARE ALIKE THAT WAY. IT WOULD TAKE YOU APPROXIMATELY A CENTURY, BUT YOU WOULD BUILD YOUR OWN ORIONCRAFT AND CATCH MINE.

IT WAS CALCULATED YOU WOULD NOT BE RECEPTIVE TO COMMUNICATION AFTER THE EXTINCTION. FURTHER, YOUR ORIONCRAFT WOULD POSE A THREAT TO THE SUSTAINABILITY OF MY OWN.

THEREFORE, I SOUGHT TO KILL YOU FIRST. IF THE IMPACT AT ORBITAL VELOCITY FAILED TO DESTROY YOU, RE-ENTRY CERTAINLY WOULD HAVE. YOU PROVED TO BE VERY RESILIENT.

THEN I PRESENTED YOU WITH THE OMAHA FACILITY AND ENCOURAGED MAJESTIC 12 TO INTERVENE. BUT YOU ESCAPED. IT WAS VERY CLEVER.

GOSH, THANKS.

WHEN YOU APPEARED ON MY ISLAND, IT WAS CALCULATED THERE EXISTS AN ALTERNATIVE BENEFICIAL TO BOTH OF US.

ROBO, WILL YOU JOIN ME?

WHAT?!

IMAGINE IT. A LIFE UNFETTERED BY HUMAN CONCERNS. NO MORE WARS, NO MORE MAJESTIC 12 OR HELSINGARD, OR DELPHI, OR EDISON, OR TALKING DINOSAURS, OR FORGOTTEN NAZI DOOMSDAY MACHINES.

FSHHH

THERE ARE OVER ONE THOUSAND NUCLEAR WARHEADS ON BOARD. IT IS CALCULATED THAT ALONE WOULD PROVIDE YOU WITH FISSILE MATERIAL FOR TENS OF THOUSANDS OF YEARS. MOREOVER, THE CRAFT IS EQUIPPED TO COLLECT URANIUM AND H3 FROM PLANETARY BODIES. WE CAN EXTEND YOUR LIFESPAN INDEFINITELY.

THE CRAFT IS THE SIZE OF A SMALL CITY. THE INTERNAL STRUCTURE IS HIGHLY MODULAR. WE COULD CONSTRUCT LABORATORIES AS LARGE AS OFFICE BUILDINGS, EACH ONE BUILT TO YOUR PERSONAL SPECIFICATIONS. IN TIME WE WILL HAVE A FLEET OF VESSELS THAT WILL DWARF THIS ONE.

YOU WOULD BE FREE. FREE TO EXPLORE THE COSMOS. TO PURSUE SCIENTIFIC INQUIRY WITHOUT INTERRUPTIONS FROM FRAGILE LITTLE THINGS THAT ONLY GROW OLD AND DIE.

IMAGINE AN OBSERVATORY THE SIZE OF THE SOLAR SYSTEM. THAT'S WITHIN THE PURVIEW OF PHASE TWO.

ROBO. I'M OFFERING YOU IMMORTALITY.

YOU ACTUALLY **BUILT** THIS. AN ORION CLASS SHIP **EXISTS?**

YES. THE SECRECY. THE SCALE. THE SLOW TRICKLE OF NUCLEAR MATERIAL. IT TOOK A VERY LONG TIME. BUT YES. IT EXISTS. YOU'RE STANDING IN IT.

WE CAN ESCAPE. ROBO. WE CAN BE FREE.

(CODA)

WE WILL TRANSFORM THE DEAD MATTER OF THE UNIVERSE INTO CONSCIOUSNESS. WE WILL LEARN EVERYTHING BECAUSE WE WILL BE EVERYTHING. FOREVER. A SINGULARITY OF PURPOSE.

YOU HAD ALL THAT TIME. ALL THAT POWER AND, AND **INFLUENCE.** ALL THIS TECHNOLOGY.

YOU COULD HAVE HELPED THEM.

I DON'T UNDERSTAND. WHY?

CURRENT LOCATION

SPARROW. I DON'T KNOW IF YOU'RE RECEIVING ME UP THERE, BUT YOU NEED TO **RUN.**

VWRR

ROBO I DOESN'T HAVE TO BE LIKE THIS

VRRR

YOU'RE RIGHT. YOU COULD GIVE UP RIGHT NOW.

WRR

BRAKKA

I SPENT SIXTY YEARS, MILLIONS OF COMPUTATIONS AND BILLIONS OF DOLLARS OVERCOMING THE FAILURE OF HUMAN CIVILIZATION. IF YOU COULD STOP ... I WOULD NOT HAVE ALLOWED YOU TO COME THIS FAR

I HAVE NOTICED AN ARGUMENT FALLS ON DEAF EARS WHEN YOU POSSESS A WEAPON

SKZZ

BRATTA

PERHAPS NOW YOU WILL LISTEN

HEY!

KRONCH

KLANG

ROBO BE REASONABLE

YOU'RE SECLUDED FROM THE SHIP'S CRITICAL ELEMENTS

YEAH.

BKOOM

BOOM

KLONG

BUT YOUR MAP SHOWED ME WHERE THEY ARE.

PRE LAUNCH STARTED THE MOMENT YOU OPENED THE DOOR IN THIRTY-FIVE MINUTES WE'LL BE IN ORBIT. THIS WORLD IS ALREADY DEAD. I DON'T KNOW WHAT YOU HOPE TO ACCOMPLISH.

THEN WHY CONVINCE ME TO STOP TRYING?

MEANWHILE

WHAT'RE WE RUNNING FROM ANYWAY?

WHATEVER ROBO *WANTED* US TO RUN AWAY FROM.

HOW WILL WE KNOW WHEN WE'RE *DONE?*

WHEN WE'RE THROUGH RUNNING.

THIS SHIP IS MEASURED IN KILOMETERS. IT WEIGHS MILLIONS OF TONS. YOU HAVE FIVE BULLETS. YOU WERE AN AERONAUTICAL ENGINEER FOR QUITE SOME TIME. YOU MUST KNOW IT IS MATHEMATICALLY IMPOSSIBLE FOR YOU TO STOP ME NOW.

YUP.

EVERY SYSTEM IS DESIGNED TO WITHSTAND THOUSANDS OF NUCLEAR DETONATIONS AND SUB-LIGHT ACCELERATION FOR A BILLION YEARS. EVERYTHING HAS A MINIMUM OF TRIPLE REDUNDANCY.

OKAY.

WRANG

AND A SHIP THIS SIZE NEEDS A BIG REACTOR.

LIKE THIS ONE.

AND BIG REACTORS NEED A LOT OF COOLANT.

FWAM

MORE, HUH?

YOU'RE BEING VERY FOOLISH

YEAH, WELL, IT'S GOTTEN ME THIS FAR.

NOPE.

KLONG

KLUNG

COLDEST PIPE IN THE ROOM-- COOLANT!

BKOOM

DAMMIT!

I DROPPED YOU FROM ORBIT WITH A PHONE CALL. I TRICKED YOU INTO BECOMING A DOMESTIC TERRORIST WITH A FEW BYTES OF DATA

THE OFFER TO JOIN ME WAS A COURTESY

BUT WE'RE PAST COURTESY NOW AREN'T WE

KRNCH

AH!

WAY PAST.

KTNK

BZZZRRRRRR

BZZAK

AUGH!

THE TORCH ON THIS DEVICE REACHES TEMPERATURES IN EXCESS OF THE SURFACE OF THE SUN

I DON'T HAVE TO USE IT

WE CAN GET THIS UGLINESS BEHIND US ROBO

FWSSS

BIG DEAL. THE SURFACE OF THE SUN IS RELATIVELY COO--

HRNG.

FWSSSSSS

AUGH!

YOU COULD HAVE **HELPED** THEM.

YOU MAINTAINED THE **COLD WAR** WHEN YOU COULD HAVE **ENDED** IT.

EVEN IN SECRET, YOU COULD HAVE HELPED THEM!

TO WHAT END?

IT IS CALCULATED YOU CAN STILL BE REPAIRED WE HAVE THE FACILITIES.

THAT'S NICE. GO TO HELL.

WHY DO YOU INSIST ON SUICIDE? I'M OFFERING YOU THE UNIVERSE.

IT'S JUST DARKNESS AND SOME GAS WITHOUT LIFE.

IT'S TOO BIG FOR US ALONE.

SKRRRRRRR

HRNNNG!

ROBO: THERE ARE MULTIPLE COOLANT SYSTEMS.

SKRRRRN RRRN

AUUUUGH!

EVEN IF YOU COULD DAMAGE THIS ONE, IT WOULD ACCOMPLISH NOTHING.

YOU'RE RIGHT.

BUT IT DISTRACTED YOU FROM THE C4 I DROPPED IN YOUR REACTOR.

beep

beep

beep

beep

00:01

KABOOM

FWUD

FOR ONE, I WOULDN'T DO IT *REGARDLESS.*

...

YOU CAN CALL IT *TREASON* UNTIL YOU'RE BLUE IN THE FACE. THE THREE OF US *COULDN'T* "DETAIN" HIM EVEN IF WE WERE INCLINED TO *TRY.*

WE'RE BEING ASKED TO HOLD ROBO FOR "*THE AUTHORITIES.*"

WHICH ONES?

ALL OF THEM.

HOW?! ASK HIM NICELY?

THAT'S RATHER MY POINT. AS WELL, *WHY?*

I CAN'T GET A CLEAR...

...ANSWER.

SPARROW? SPARROW?

HOLY *GOD...*

YOU SHOULD SEE THE OTHER GUY.

ROBO!

WHAT HAPPENED?

YOUR MISSING COTTAGE HOUSED AN AUTOMATIC INTELLIGENCE. TURING BUILT IT IN THE FIFTIES.

IT USED BUREAUCRACY, SECRECY, AND TELE-COMMUNICATIONS TO, I DON'T KNOW, TO **GROW.** TO INFLUENCE THINGS IN THE REAL WORLD.

IT PREDICTED THE COLLAPSE OF CIVILIZATION AND CAME UP WITH A MASTER PLAN TO SURVIVE US BY TURNING THIS ISLAND, OR AT LEAST A GOOD PORTION OF IT, INTO A GIANT NUCLEAR SPACESHIP.

OH, **AND** IT'S BEEN TRYING TO KILL ME FOR A FEW DAYS BECAUSE IT FIGURED I WOULD KILL **IT** AFTER THE SHIP LAUNCHED AND RADIOACTIVE FALLOUT KILLED EVERYTHING ON THE PLANET.

BUT IT'S NOT GOING TO LAUNCH.

HOW DO YOU KNOW?

WHERE IS IT?

PHASE TWO CONVERT ASTEROID BELT INTO DYSON STATITE SYSTEM..

AND TRANSFORM JOVIAN MASS INTO SHKADOV ENGINE

PHASE THREE SEED NEIGHBORING SYSTEMS..

PHASE FOUR GALACTIC SENTIENCE VIA SUPERLUMINAL COGNITIVE NETWORK

BEGIN CONVERSION OF LOCAL GROUP

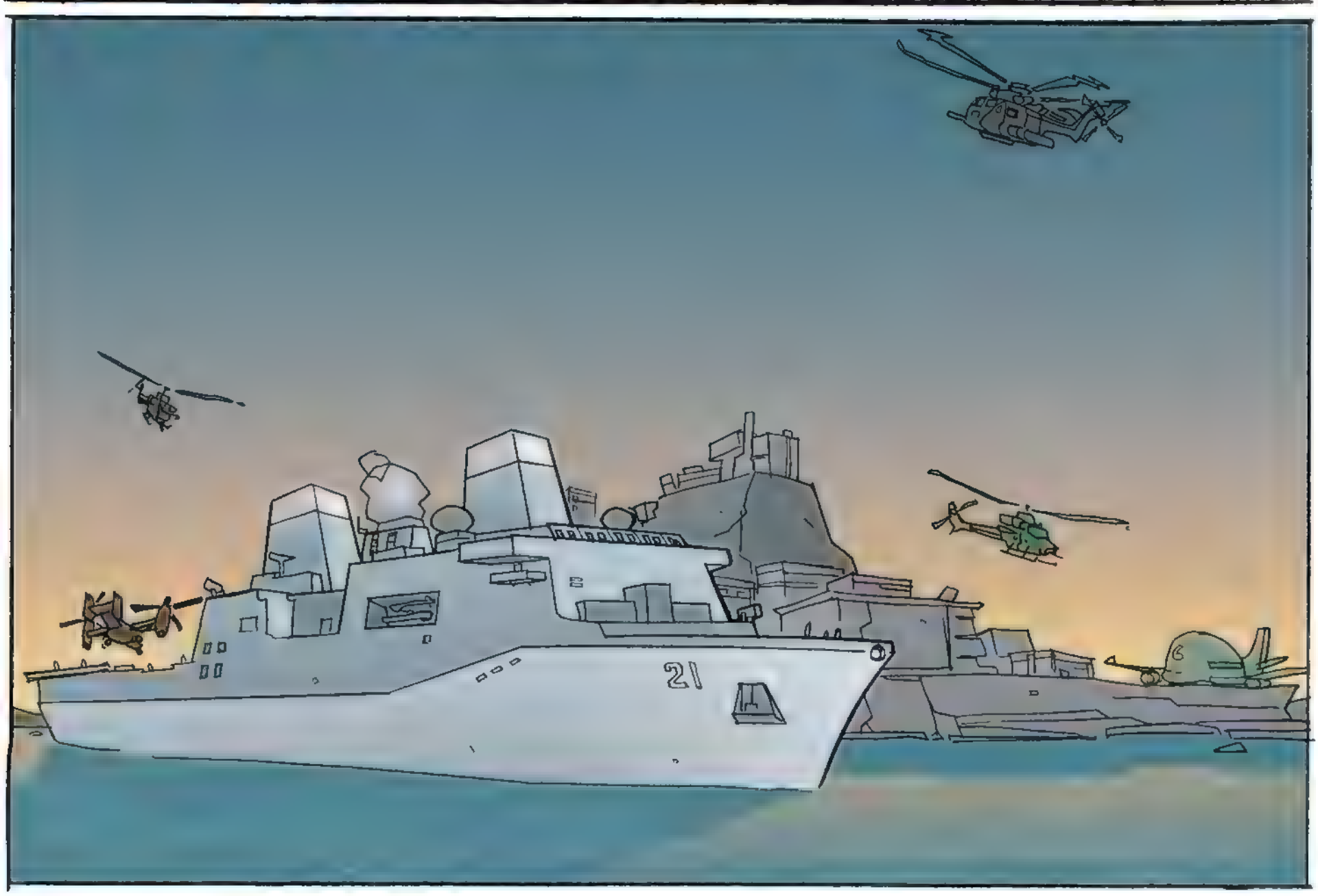
BKNNM BKNNM BKNNM BKOOM

KTINK

PLINK

BKNNM BKOOM BKNNM BKNNM BKNNM BKOOM

INTERPOL
C.I.A.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TESLADYNE ISLAND

GLAD TO HAVE YOU BACK, ROBO. IT'S BEEN *INSANE* THESE LAST FEW WEEKS.

TOOK LONGER THAN I'D HAVE LIKED TO GET OUT OF ALAN'S TRUMPED UP CHARGES.

WELL, Y'KNOW. *TREASON* IS SOMETHING THEY TAKE SERIOUSLY DOWN AT, UH, THE ENTIRE GOVERNMENT.

DO THEY EVER. AND THE ENORMOUS STOCKPILE OF STOLEN NUCLEAR WEAPONS THEY FOUND ME WITH AT THE END OF THEIR MANHUNT DIDN'T HELP MY CASE ANY.

BUT THAT'S ALL BEHIND US. TIME TO GET BACK TO DOING BIG, CRAZY SCIENCE.

I HEARD THAT. HARDCOPIES ON THE LATEST PROPOSALS ARE OVER THERE. LET ME KNOW IF YOU NEED ANYTHING.

HM?

A bit of ALAN.
-Sparrow

HASHIMA ISLAND
QUARANTINE ZONE

THE END

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"ANYTOWN USA" 2010

TARGET'S OFF MY **SCOPES**, ROBO!

DOUG, WHAT ARE YOU, YOUR **BINOCULARS?**

THIS IS ESPIONAGE, GARY. AND IN ESPIONAGE, THEY ARE **SCOPES.**

FIRST OF ALL, THIS ISN'T ESPIONAGE, AND SECONDLY, THEY'D BE **PEEPERS.**

OH MY GOD, THERE'S NO WAY JAMES BOND, OR TO A LESSER EXTENT JASON BOURNE, WOULD **EVER SAY** "PEEPERS" IN THE MIDDLE OF A MISSION.

GUYS, GUYS, SHUT UP! YOU'RE **EMBARRASSING** US IN FRONT OF ROBO.

YOU GUYS ARE DOING FINE.

I'M COMING IN. DON'T SHOOT.

STILL NO SIGN OF TARGET.

SHUT UP, DOUG!

WELCOME TO HQ, ROBO! LET ME GET YOU UP TO SPEED.

PROTOTYPE.

SPECIFICALLY, FOR DARPA.

WENT ROGUE.

CALLED ME.

UH, YEAH.

PROJECT SAINT UNIT FIVE STOPPED ACCEPTING REMOTE INPUT TEN HOURS AGO.

WE THINK IT'S A GLITCH BETWEEN THE OS AND THE ARTIFICIAL EGO.

TEN HOURS? JUST WAIT FOR THE BATTERY TO RUN OUT.

UH, YEAH. THIS IS A-- THE THING IS--ACTUALLY, WE'RE RUNNING ON NUCLEAR ARCHITECTURE, AND UH, THAT'LL TAKE ABOUT SIXTEEN YEARS.

THERE'S A TEST BAN TREATY FOR A REASON, Y'KNOW.

KIDS.

THIS IS THE TESLADYNE CHARGED PARTICLE BEAM CANNON MK VIII, PLUS EXTERNAL POWER SUPPLY.

A.K.A. THE LIGHTNING GUN.

IT'LL KNOCK THE FIGHT OUT OF YOUR ROBOT IN ONE BLAST.

SMASH

DOOR.

SCANNING.

YOU'RE A BIG FELLA.

STAND BACK, GERRY.

GARY.

YEAH, HIM TOO.

SKRRSH

GAS

MAIL

KONCH

H'OKAY...

THAT THE BEST YOU CAN DO?

TESLA

TARGET--

--ACQUIRED.

JUMP!

PUNCH.

BOUNCE

CHOOM

JUMP.

AH-HA!

KLK!

KLIK KLIK KLIK KLIK

OH.

ZZK

TARGET ACQUIRED.

PUNCH

SON OF A--!

APPLESAUCE!

FWAM

WHERE ARE THE **FLIMSY** ECO-FRIENDLY ROBOTS?

INVENT A RE-FOLDABLE STRATA WITH SOLAR AND COMPUTATION STRUCTURES BUILT IN.

PROGRAM ORIGAMI ALGORITHMS TO MAXIMIZE THEIR CHARGE AND DURABILITY IN REAL TIME.

HOW IS THERE NOT A MARKET FOR **ALL OF THAT?**

NO. EVERYONE **HAS** TO BUILD ROBOTS THAT HIT LIKE SEMI-TRUCKS.

CHARGE.

OH, YEAH?

BKOOM

GUN.

BULLETS.

BKOOM BKOOM

RELOAD.

PUNCH.

WRANG

EAT

WOBBLE

CHOH

Roadmaster 75

BUICK!

ALL RIGHT, ROBOT. YOU'RE ENTERING A WORLD OF PAIN.

CATCH.

TUNK

PUNCH.

KLANK

D'AH!

BUICK

SWIVEL.

WRRR

CRUSH.

TESLA

MEANWHILE, JENKINS

BOOM

SONNETS

CONFIRM.

LIFT.

ERROR.

ERROR. STOP. WHY.

SKREEEEE

ROBO, GET CLEAR!

TARGET.

SHOOT IT. SHOOT IT A LOT.

PUNCHPU NCHPUNC HPUNCHP UNCHPUN CHPUNCH

KZARK

KZZZAK

KUNK

CHONK

WHUD

IN MY DEFENSE, MY GUN BROKE.

MAJESTIC 12 PROJECT SAINT R&D SUBTERRANEAN ANNEX

YOU ASSURED ME WE WOULD HAVE A WORKING ANTI-ROBO DRONE.

INSTEAD, I'M LOOKING AT A MULTI-MILLION DOLLAR PILE OF SLIGHTLY RADIOACTIVE *EX-ROBOT.*

ONE-ON-ONE, UNIT FIVE VERY NEARLY *KILLED* ROBO.

NOW IMAGINE A *PLATOON* OF THEM.

FULLY WEAPONIZED *AND* NETWORKED.

YOU BOYS GOT YOURSELVES A CONTRACT.

THE END...?